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VOLUME 15 ISSUE 10

15TH YEAR
ANNIVERSARY

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Dell Empowers Businesses
Xiaomi Surprise

TESTED
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Razer Leviathan

GAME TIME
Comic Fiesta 2014
Binding of Isaac: Rebirth
Heroes of the Storm

Rise of the CHINESE TITANS

**What Happens When
Four Mighty Dragons
Meet Face-To-Face?**

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CES Splendour and the Dragons' Clash

February is an awesome month for us Malaysians. Thanks to all the holidays we get, it always feels like the month just zips by. That does mean we have to work faster than usual and by the time you read this, we are probably hard at work on the March 2015 issue. But I'm here to tell you about our February 2015 issue, and starting this month we're going to mix things up a bit as we put together a comprehensive thematic issue for this month.

The Consumer Electronics Show is always an exciting event of the year and we try our best to cover the biggest announcements. From classy new consumer products to the downright quirky, CES 2015 has plenty to offer. The big brands feature prominently as we see a slew of new consumer products that are set to be released within the year. Check out our coverage of the biggest highlights this year in page 26-49.

Looking for a gift for that special other? We're not immune to the annual day of flowers and expensive dinners, but we like approaching things from a different angle! We've prepared

a list "For Him" and "For Her" in page 62-67, so you can pick the right gadget for your date on Valentine's Day.

And how can we forget the Lunar Chinese New Year just around the corner? Thanks to rapid rise in popularity of smart devices from China, people are beginning to how they are able to do so well. Find out from our February 2015 cover story, "Rise of the Sleeping Dragons". Next after that will be our February showdown of the latest Chinese flagship smartphones; find out how they compare.

In our GameTime section, this month we also cover two days of Comic Fiesta, an event that grows bigger every year. There's also a review on the Alpha Testing of Blizzard's MOBA Heroes of the Storm, check it out if you love their games.

There's lots more to read, but I won't spoil all of it.

To all our readers out there, Happy Chinese New Year!

Have fun reading!

FUJI XEROX

Make the connection from anywhere

Monochrome

DocuPrint P225 db / P225 d
A4 Mono Printer

DocuPrint P265 dw
A4 Mono Printer

DocuPrint M225 dw
A4 3-in-1 Mono Printer

DocuPrint M225 z
A4 4-in-1 Mono Printer

DocuPrint M265 z
A4 4-in-1 Mono Printer

Colour

DocuPrint CP115 w
A4 Colour Printer

DocuPrint CP116 w
A4 Colour Printer

DocuPrint CP225 w
A4 Colour Printer

DocuPrint CM115 w
A4 3-in-1 Colour Printer

DocuPrint CM225 fw
A4 4-in-1 Colour Printer

Mesmerised by Four

Samsung GALAXY Note 4

by victor yap

I know the review for this long awaited GALAXY Note entry came out last month. By the time it got to the news-stands, Apple has already proven its mettle to the world as it took out Samsung for a Sunday drive with its new iPhones. The market response is no lie and, thus, it is very obvious as to how far Apple has pushed to be where it is today.

Personally, this isn't a true and total lost for Team Korea since all the fruity brand did is make the wall harder to scale. In the long run, I'd feel things would even out, especially since Samsung has listened to the fans and have included the improvements that many have demanded for ever since the GALAXY S4 appeared.

DESIGN: FUTURE IN BUILD

For many GALAXY iterations - in fundamentally all its ranges - many have wondered when Samsung will ever break away from its traditional mould. Some believed that the GALAXY S5 would have taken charge of that but when it appeared, it really didn't fall far from the tree. This is even when it has a slicker and sleeker build. Besides the patterned backplate that is reminiscent of a spotty sound-proofing panel, everything else - from the industrial design and toughened sides, exuded a level of design innovation that had originally been lacking in previous GALAXY flagships. The GALAXY Note 4 takes it to the next level with an even impossibly slimmer chassis and classier body look. The whole thing just works as it felt really comfortable when I held it. Personally, this is an improvement over its predecessors on all levels.

SCREEN: 4X PERFORMANCE

Visual performance has always been top priority for users. That means being able to see hyper realistic images that have exceptionally vivid colours and offer extra sharp clarity. How this plays out for the GALAXY Note 4 is pretty obvious the improved display brings out the best contrast, hues, and balances for whatever content that is shown on the 5.7in screen of the new GALAXY Note. This is, of course, provided the multimedia content used - be it games, images, and movies - are high quality to begin with as the Quad HD Super AMOLED Display will show obvious discrepancies when low quality content is used.

SOUND: SINGLE POWERHOUSE

A great display must be paired with an equally as high performing sound system.

In the case of the GALAXY Note 4, all the expectations of an awesome audio output depends on one speaker array. Does it deliver? Saying, "It does!" will not cut it at all - truly! The speaker used on the new GALAXY Note is, without a doubt, a show-stopper. While there are no stereo effects, the sound-staging and distinctively rich sound mix more than makes up for that. Everything - be it raspy vocals to warm tones of a tenor/alto voice, the rapid gunfire and cannon reports, loud crash of cymbals and clanging gears, crunch of knuckles in a boxing bout, and soft hiss of a carbonated drink or the turbo-charger being engaged - came out exactly as it had been intended. I doubled checked by running the same sound run through a mixer-linked pair of monitors and it came out the same, though the new GALAXY Note does filter out some nuances that the headset picked up.

PERFORMANCE: UNPARALLELED

It's easy to say that the GALAXY Note 4 is a real high performer. Using an Octa-Core CPU (1.9GHz for primary, and 1.3GHz for secondary), there is simple no denying that it will run in a silky smooth manner. Every enriched HD content I threw at it - from games to compressed 4K video and even mixed media elements - had been taken on with relative ease. The only piece of content the new GALAXY Note had issues with is raw 4K video as it struggled with lag and frame stutters. I like how everything came out looking seamlessly enhanced with nearly no flaw in the content processing.

CAMERA: SHARP SHOT

Wonders upon wonders, the camera that the GALAXY Note 4 uses has been given an advanced 16MP sensor with 4K video recording (at 30fps). That is insane! Throughout my time with it, images turned out super clear and even videos have been given a new level of clarity. I like how the camera responded quickly and snapped visuals as soon as it powers up. Even the enhanced 3.7MP front-facing camera is no slouch as it quickly took the selfies I wanted without missing a beat. However, I have to say the accompanying flash can be a little overkill. This, thankfully, can be managed though I still feel the lighting assistance it provides gives my shots an artificial feel.

VIDEO: 4K RECORD

How many smart devices have come out to say they have 4K video recording? Only a handful no? Well, the GALAXY Note 4 is one such device as it to record video at Ultra HD resolution - AKA 3840 x 2160 @ 30fps. With the built-in auto-focus, f/1.9

Price: RM2,499
Dimensions (W x H x D 153.5 X 78.6 X 8.5 mm
Weight 176g
Display 5.7in Quad HD Super AMOLED (2560 x1440)
CPU 2.7GHz Quad Core, 1.9GHz Octa Core (1.9GHz Quad + 1.3GHz Quad Core)
Memory 3GB RAM Storage: 32GB (Supports microSD up to 64GB)
Network
- 2.5G (GSM/GPRS/EDGE): 850/900/1800/1900 MHz
- 3G (HSPA + 42Mbps): 850/900/1900/2100 MHz
- 4G (LTE Cat.4 150/50Mbps) or 4G (LTE Cat.6 300/50Mbps)

Connectivity
- Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac (2X2 MIMO)
- Download Booster, NFC, Bluetooth v 4.1 (BLE,ANT+), USB2.0, MHL 3.0

Audio
- Codec: MP3, AAC/AAC+/ eAAC+, WMA, AMR-NB/WB, Vorbis, FLAC
- Adapt Sound, Sound Alive, Wise Voice 2.0, Extra Volume 2.0
- 3 Mics (Directional Voice Recording)

Features S Pen (Hovering 15mm, Pressure level 2,048), Sensors (Gesture, Accelerometer, Geo-magnetic, Gyroscope, RGB ambient light, Proximity, Barometer, Hall Sensor, Finger Scanner, UV, HRM)

lens, and the Samsung Optical Image Stabiliser (OIS), recordings on the new GALAXY Note now look their best. While still not native 4K recording, I'd take whatever is given to me on a plate now and work with it. I mean, it is 4K recording in the palm of my hand!

WRITE: SMOOTH RESPONSE

The GALAXY Note is known for its writing capabilities. While it has been a hit-and-miss situation so far, the new GALAXY Note stylus, AKA the New S Pen, is more seamless than before thanks to the advanced writing recognition that Samsung has included. This new system allows for a smoother writing experience that feels exactly like writing with pen and paper. The Korean brand achieved this through the re-design of the S Pen, the use of innovative pressure sensitivity, and progressive accompanying apps. All that, plus the intuitive user experience functions it offers, work to create that free-form, ultra-smooth, life-like writing experience for the GALAXY Note 4.

APPS: SMARTER NOW

With the improved writing experience that the S Pen offers, one can expect the GALAXY Note 4 to be loaded with a slew of new features that would fully leverage on the upgrades that the updated stylus offers. Of the many Samsung has added - like the Smart Select, Photo Note, and additional inclusions on the S Pen app, my

personal favourite is definitely the Photo Note. Imagine being able to snap a shot of text and save, then edit, the content of the image to fit your documents or presentations. Live editing and instant tweaking of the text, for me, is a big 'Wow moment' for me. Coming a close second is the Smart Select ability that allows users to choose the content they want from any text, screen capture, or app. This fully complements the Photo Note so well.

FITNESS: HEART-RATE TRACKER

Like some if its peers, the GALAXY Note 4 comes bundled with a heart-rate monitor (HRM) AKA the fingerprint scanner. Unlike its predecessor and the competition, this one functions well enough as it tracks with ease my heart-rate via the scanning of my finger. The scanner also works as an ultraviolet detector and can be used to scan the levels of the harmful rays from the sun to see how much sunblock you'd need. Guiltily, I never used that last feature much in comparison to the HRM feature. Fingerprint scanning? Never had a need for it so you're asking the wrong guy if it works or not.

BATTERY: DAY LONG

For all the bells and whistles the GALAXY Note 4 provides, I'd stop to wonder at times if the battery would last. Powered with just a 3220mAh battery, which isn't really higher than its predecessor, I had been expecting the fully charged power source to go flat in a couple of hours. Somehow, thanks to the new Android operation system and improved Samsung TouchWiz launcher, the power lasted for over a day and a little more after that. With the stuff I do on it - using multitasking, having multi-app window control, engaging many times the ultra-convenient Smart Select and Photo Note functions, playing my Match-3 games, checking out FaceBook and Twitter, streaming Full HD content on YouTube, and leaving the Wi-Fi on and always connected, I am very amazed at how well the power management is with this device. Kudos to Samsung for really pulling through on developing the best power efficient GALAXY Note entry yet.

CONCLUSION: GET IT!

While sales of the GALAXY Note 4 is obviously not doing too well, keep in mind that I am not writing this as a way to boost sales. That's my full disclosure. For me, the GALAXY Note 4 is the proper culmination of the ideas, concepts, and user demands that Samsung has compiled over the years and translated them all into what is now known as the GALAXY Note 4. I really believe this is a great smartphone to have as it properly exemplify how an interactive device should be like. 🅿

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4K15 fps / 1080p60 fps	12MP / 30 fps Burst	Control. View. Share.	131' (40m)

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HILIGHT TAG
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QUIKCAPTURE
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PROFESSIONAL AUDIO PERFORMANCE
Powerful new audio system captures clean, high fidelity sound with nearly 2x the dynamic range.

AUTO LOW LIGHT
Automatically adjusts frame rates for optimal low-light performance.

*Compared to the HERO3+ Black Edition

Strategies for Mitigating Mobile Security Threats

It all ties in with increasing productivity

*Matthew Johnston,
Managing Director for
South Asia, Dell Software*

T he mobile workforce is no longer satisfied with simply having access to corporate email and calendars; employees expect access to all of the applications and data needed to perform all job tasks from a multitude of personal devices anywhere, anytime. The threat of mobile worker trends not only open businesses up to corporate data loss and malware, but results in productivity loss.

Mitigation is possible as there are a number of strategies for enabling mobile worker productivity while still protecting corporate networks from threats, such as:

• To consider which applications mobile users need access to
Organisations must determine whether corporate applications and resources that are in demand operate via web-based, client/server-based, or host-based. This includes gaining access to VoIP or VDI.

This will help determine which technologies will be the best fit for securing back-end networks. To best meet mobile worker needs, it is important to look for secure access control solutions that enable access to the apps and data required for today and tomorrow.

• To consider which devices workers will use to access resources IT needs to consider not only the immediate need, but also what devices they will expect to use in the coming months. This includes deciding whether mobile devices are replacing notebooks and PCs, or if they are required to support mobile devices, notebooks, and PCs.

Most businesses will have requirements to support a hybrid environment consisting of legacy devices plus smartphones and tablets using varying operating systems and platforms.

When developing an organization's mobile security strategy, always keep in view that the regulatory requirements for securing data is key to success across all avenues. If company data is subject to regulatory requirements, IT will likely need to enforce device password lock, on-device data encryption, and possibly require secure containers to separate corporate data and applications from personal apps and data stored on the device.

• Deploying layered security
Such practices ensure protection from hidden malware so that users and their devices accessing the corporate network are trusted. Increasingly, the traffic going over the network is encrypted, so businesses need to not only be able to inspect traffic that is unencrypted, but also to de-crypt the encrypted traffic.

The little bit of data on a phone that's lost on a train isn't likely to harm an organization's network. However, with the potential for that lost device to be used as a conduit to hack into the network, all businesses must make it their goal to protect the back-end applications and data infrastructure. **PC**

Omnipotent Performance
Sharp Cloud Smarthome Security

When it comes to security systems for the home, none is as easy as what Sharp offers. Thanks to newly launched Sharp Cloud Smarthome System (CSS), the very idea of wanting to engage a truly innovative yet easy-to-use security suite for the home is within everyone's grasps now.

In this second instalment, the focus moves to Sharp Roxy Sales & Service Company (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd (Sharp Malaysia) push for advanced location monitoring, multi-management access, and enhanced scalability via its new home security system.

MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

With just one app, users can view and monitor their home with relative ease. In fact, they can check on their security system from wherever they are. Also, users who are travelling abroad without internet connectivity can choose to be notified via automated voice call in the event of any activated incident.

PROGRESSIVE CONTROLS

Offering multiple user, multi-tier access is pretty unique for a security system. Beyond accessing and tracking all the cameras and sensors, owners can allow authorised users to receive push notifications, arm/disarm, and view event history. Additionally, the owner is able to assign an additional five more emergency contacts to receive the emergency SMS notification. Of course, this is when only the alarm is triggered. This allow multiple users to take immediate and necessary actions to protect their loved ones.

SCALE ON DEMAND

Expansion is always on the cards as users will certainly have plans to lockdown a few parts of the home with even more sensors. There may be other areas that require the deployment of more sensors and cameras that are meant to be tied in to the main OPU. With the Sharp Cloud Smarthome System (CSS), loading up on new sensor and monitoring equipment is pretty straightforward as Sharp made the entire system easy to scale-up or -down as and when it is required. Seamless installation at its finest.

More on the HD monitoring and failsafe back-ups next month!

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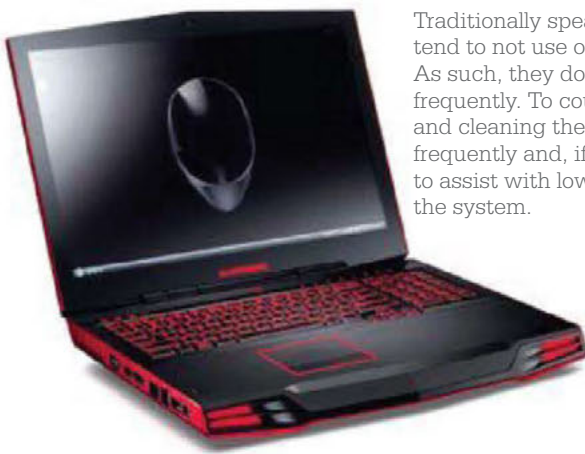
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Vinodhani Nair K
Managing expectations
05/02/2015   12:32   56KB

Victor Yap
Time to part
08/02/2015   14:43   5KB

Matthew Yap
I can do this!
08/02/2015   03:00   5KB

Nisya Aziz
Sunway again!
14/02/2015   13:57   17KB

K.S. Tan
The Heat
15/02/2015   23:11   17KB

Pelly Toh
Can I cekik him?
20/02/2015   17:42   17KB

Nain Mazlan
Went south
21/02/2015   06:00   6KB

Farhana
Warming up!
22/02/2015   04:15   16KB

Sia Zhen Ning
It's time to lay the smackdown!
26/02/2015   03:00   1KB

From   **K.S. Tan**

Is it natural for my gaming laptop to reach 70° Celsius and above? Or is there something wrong with my notebook?

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Reply

To   **K.S. Tan**

From   PC.com

Traditionally speaking, gaming notebooks tend to not use optimal cooling solutions. As such, they do break the 70° Celsius mark frequently. To counter that, try dusting and cleaning the vents of your notebook frequently and, if possible, get a cooling mat to assist with lowering the temperature of the system.

Are antivirus necessary for a computer?

Paranoid Android
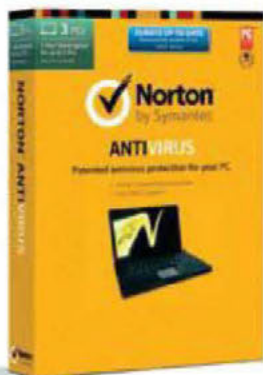
While it isn't compulsory to install an antivirus in your computer, it is recommended to have at least a basic protection system installed. Personally speaking, Windows Defender has done well over the years but if you want to be safe than sorry then you can easily get a free antivirus software off the Internet.

Is there a difference in performance between a RM20 HDMI cable and a RM100 HDMI cable?

V.I.

Based on experiences, there is barely any difference between premium HDMI cables and cheap variants. Those with keener eyes may be able to spot the difference but unless you're extremely obsessed over the visual quality of your movies or shows, there is no need to splurge that much money on a cable.

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FEB 2015

Printing on the Go

Fuji Xerox tackles wireless printing

H ere comes a new range of printers from Fuji Xerox Asia Pacific Ptd Ltd. The company featured new monochrome and colour printers, which allows painless connectivity to wireless or mobile devices. This will help with productivity in personal and small workgroups. To add to that, the DocuPrint P225/265 series and DocuPrint C115/225 series have high print quality, are easy to use and efficient.

Speaking at the launch, General Manager of Fuji Xerox Printers Malaysia, Ken Lee said, "This launch sees Fuji Xerox offer a comprehensive range of colour printers for personal and small workgroups. Perfect for people on the move, these printers deliver simple wireless connectivity and unparalleled print quality from any Apple or Android device and, of course, through any PC."

According to Lee, with the new DocuPrint P225/265 and DocuPrint C115/225 series printers, you can now easily connect and print wirelessly from iOS or Android devices. Featuring AirPrint and Google Cloud Print, most smartphones or tablets should be compatible with the new printers. Users will not need to download any apps or install drivers on their devices, which makes it convenient for the less tech-savvy. Activating the Wi-Fi is simple enough, thanks to the one-touch setup. Coupled with the built-in networking, sharing this printer to your co-workers in workgroups is a breeze.

The DocuPrint C115/225 series printers uses Fuji Xerox's Self-Scanning Light Emitting Diode (SLED) and Digitally-Enhanced Lighting Control Imaging System (DELCIS) technology for the best in print quality. Thanks to the printer's CPU and memory, it can also print at speeds of up to 18ppm for black/white and colour. Other features on some of the new printers in the two series include built in duplex printing and Single-Pass Duplex Automatic Document Feeder on the DocuPrint M265z.

The DocuPrint M265z also has a 2.7in colour touch screen interface, while the DocuPrint CM225fw comes with a larger 4.3in colour touch screen interface to provide ease of use. 🔳

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Swiss technology
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GALAXY

Lee showing off the sleek and stylish Samsung GALAXY A5 at the launch event.

(Fourth from left, middle) Lee demonstrating how the wide selfie feature of the newly-launched Samsung GALAXY A5 works as he snaps a shot with other VIPs and models.

Samsung's A List

Samsung rings in the new year with selfies in mind

by sia zhen ning

Continuing the trend of including social network connectivity and metallic frames for its smartphones, Samsung has launched the new GALAXY A3 and -A5. Pitched as the perfect union of technology and human connections, both entries into the GALAXY series showcase the most advanced functions that are optimised for a social networking experience centred around the user. All of that comes packaged in a refine, premium metallic trim.

Measuring at 6.9mm and 6.7mm respectively, the GALAXY A3 and A5 are Samsung's slimmest smartphones to date. Both come equipped with refined full metal unibody designs and are done up in a variety of catchy hues like Pearl White, Midnight Black, Platinum Silver, and Champagne Gold.

Samsung reinforced its desire to cater towards the selfie crowd with the GALAXY A3 and A5 as both smartphones feature an advanced 5MP front-facing camera with an innovative Wide Selfie mode. With this function, users are able to capture a group picture without huddling close to one another just to nab the perfect shot. Sharing photos and videos on their favourite social media channels is easy as well, as both phones support the LTE Category 4 standard.

The other standout part of the GALAXY A3 and A5 is the extraordinary Super AMOLED display and Adaptive Display technology that the panel comes paired with. Both innovations allow the new A-Series smartphones to deliver clearer images with deep contrast and better viewing angles that are more vivid and colourful, in virtually any environment and even under bright sunlight. The GALAXY A3 and A5 will retail for RM899 and RM1,199 respectively.

"As more young people are getting smartphones, social networks apps are booming as they feed, in turn, the selfie craze that has swept over the world in the past year. The GALAXY A5 and GALAXY A3 jump on the selfie bandwagon as they further redefine the trend with their signature wide selfie feature," says Lee Jui Siang, Vice President of Mobile, IT and Digital Imaging of Samsung Malaysia Electronics. 🖥️

2015 for Intel

A year of innovative integration

by victor yap

According to Sumner Lemon, the recently appointed Country Manager of Intel Malaysia and Singapore, the Internet of Things (IoT) trend has pushed forward the agenda for advanced technological and computational power that is nearly unprecedented.

"We're on the cusp of a wave where we're bringing new technology and capabilities to a whole spectrum of devices. Innovation will continue to build out new platforms and devices," Lemon shares as one of his key points during his first 2015 deep engagement session with the media.

As it is, the world now demands for multiple platform usage, seamless automation and synching processes, integrated content, and the delivery of personalised user experiences. All these factors are to be addressed via technologies that now perpetuate within the daily lives of everyone - smart devices, interactive computing platforms, and wearables.

"In this age of IoT, innovation will be focused on producing connected devices that are geared towards delivering immersive user experiences - basically devices that are hyper-intuitive and truly made-to-be convenient as they operate as personal smart companions," Lemon notes.

With IoT, concepts like 3D imaging and printing, multi-tiered device integration, progressive user content, and immersive wearables will be the focus for 2015. When prompted about Intel's own venture into the wearable space, Lemon notes how, "Since Intel is working with system integrators to put out such platforms, the marketing of such systems are directly managed through these companies. Thus, it is up to them if they want to make Malaysia a focus market for the Intel-based wearables that they are producing."

The same notion is applicable for the 3D sensing and smart platform concepts

Lemon: We're on the cusp of a wave where we're bringing new technology and capabilities to a whole spectrum of devices.

that Intel has showcased at this year's CES. Lemon reveals that many Malaysians system integrators have already moved in to see what they can do with the new tech that Intel has produced. PC

Mechanical Titan

by matthew yap

World's first mechanical keyboard equipped gaming notebook

News of it has been around and many have already seen it, but nonetheless the new MSI GT80 Titan officially launched to an excited media and public audience at the recently held Malaysia IT Fair 2015.

The MSI GT80 Titan is a massive 18.4in gaming notebook that comes with an Intel Core i7-4980HQ processor, 16GB DDR3 RAM and an NVIDIA 8GB GTX 980M SLI. That's right! This powerhouse has not just one but TWO GTX980, making sure you get to play all your favourite games on Ultra settings or even with down-sampled 4K resolution.

As part of its cooperation with SteelSeries, the GT80 is also the first gaming notebook to feature a backlit mechanical keyboard with Cherry MX Brown switches, which makes it ideal for gaming and work.

Eric Kuo, Vice President of Global Sales and Marketing at MSI Notebook, notes: "As the first of its kind, the GT80 Titan takes that major step into the future by integrating a proper mechanical keyboard with Cherry switches into the 18in mobile gaming beast. Apart from this, the GT80 Titan also features NVIDIA GeForce GTX 980M graphics, Intel's best and latest mobile CPU, as well as our usual selection of carefully developed MSI gaming technologies."

The GT80 Titan's biggest asset is its customisability. Popping open the top panel above the keyboard area allows users to swap out the RAM modules, HDD, and the M.2 SSD. If owners feel that it is time to upgrade the GPU, the dual GTX 980M can also be swapped out by removing the bottom plate. This means that the GT80 Titan is fully future-proof and can be kept

in use as long as future upgrades can be applied to the architecture.

MSI also gave a sneak peek of the MSI GE62 Apache, an upgrade that comes in either GTX 965M or 970M configurations with a dual exhaust system and a SteelSeries gaming keyboard. The GE62 Apache makes use of a new power design to ensure 46% improvement of its battery life. Of course, it's also thinner and lighter than the GE60. PC

Looking Inside

Intel brings out its biggest guns at CES

by sia zhen ning

Brian Krzanich, CEO of Intel, sharing about the wonders Intel plans to reveal at CES that is set to transform 2015.
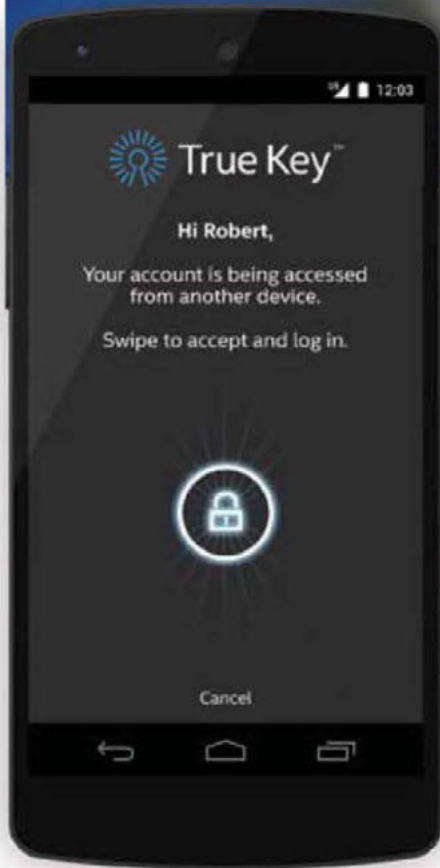
It certainly seems appropriate that Intel kicks off PC.com's massive CES coverage for this year since it has made some milestone announcements at the Las Vegas event. While some of the new tech had long been expected for the masses, some new concepts are definitely in the realm of the mind-boggling.

Without further ado, let's dive right into the world of wonders that CES put out for all to see!

GOING BEYOND

Intel has had an extremely eventful CES this year as it shows off almost everything plus the kitchen sink. From new processors to wearables and even intelligent drones, Intel has brought their A-Game to CES and many are left feeling extremely intrigued. Here are some of the highlights of Intel's showing at CES.

BROADWELL REVEAL

After months of rumours and teasing, Intel has finally revealed its 5th Generation Core Processors - codenamed Broadwell. Now on a 14nm manufacturing process, Broadwell aims to, once again, bring improved performances to consumers, further extend battery life for all devices, and, of course, create an even better user experience. Intel is releasing 14 new processors in this range, splitting them nicely into 15W and 28W processors.

This 14nm process pushes the die shrink further, increasing the processed miniaturisation by another 37% from the Intel 4th Generation Core. However, the new CPU platform will have 35% more transistors, translating to 22% better 3D graphics, 50% faster video conversion, improved productivity by another 4%, and - very important for mobiles and notebooks - boosting battery life by another 1 1/2 hours. These advancements are a boon to the mobile device user since they can now enjoy more movies on the go, carry out video conversions on 2-in-1s at a faster rate, and get better framerates on graphically demanding mobile games.

Intel is also set to not only boost the performance of notebooks but also for the highly popular 2-in-1s, Chromebooks, All-in-One desktops, and mini PCs. Based on the new Broadwell microarchitecture, Intel expects to be able to produce new CPUs that are able to support a wide variety of smart devices.

The first of many is the CPU Intel quietly shipped out during the holiday season, AKA the "Cherry Tail" 14nm processor, to tablet manufacturers. This new System-on-Chip (SoC) is 64-bit ready and comes paired with Intel Gen 8-LP graphics. Besides progressive performance and an enhanced healthy battery life, devices that come equipped with this new CPU and Intel XMM 726x chipset are able to support

Krzanich reveals how small Intel Curie really is.

LTE-Advance, promising CAT-6 speeds (300Mbps) and carrier aggregation. This new mobile products should reach the consumer market within the first half of this year.

Desktop users aren't left out as well since Intel put out teasers for Skylake - an upcoming platform made specifically for high performance desktop PCs and dedicated gaming notebooks.

RISE OF THE WEARABLES

With wearables growing exponentially in the last few years, Intel quickly jumped into the fray by disclosing its plans for the Intel Curie module - a tiny system that is wholly-based on the company's first purpose-built SoC for wearables. Part of its efforts include announcing joint-ventures with multiple products and initiatives with different fashion, fitness, and lifestyle brands. The Oakley initiative is one such trial as the partnership fuses premium, luxury, and sports eyewear with smart technologies.

THREE DIMENSIONAL INTERACTION

Even human interaction with computers will be redefined with Intel thanks to its plans to usher computing into a 3D and seamless world. Intel reinforces this notion by showing off a range of capabilities that will be introduced in products by the end of the year such as True Key - a newly announced cross-platform app that manages identity security; 3D intuition and controls as well as robotics and visualisation controls on drones via RealSense; and advanced wireless charging collaborations with Hilton, Jaguar Land Rover, San Francisco International Airport, and Marriott. PC

SONY

4K

BRAVIA meets Android TV™

4K

The 4K Rush

Sony goes UHD-centric in CES

by sia zhen ning

Ultra HD seems to be the running theme for Sony this year as it pulled back the curtains on its new TVs and camcorders that are 4K ready, alongside other products, peripherals, and services.

VISUAL CENTRIC

Part of the announcement saw a metric ton of 4K-ready products, so let's focus on the TV division first. A total of 11 new 4K BRAVIA LCD TVs will be brought to the market across three line-ups - all of them powered with Sony's own innovative 4K Processor X1.

This new line of BRAVIA sets includes the X9000C series, the only line that offers a 'Floating Style' design concept. This design boasts the world's thinnest build at approximately 4.9mm on the thinnest point of the bezel. Alongside the X9000C, Sony also revealed the X9300C - the world's first TV that supports Hi-Res audio as it comes equipped with Hi-Res compatible speakers and boasts Sony's proprietary DSEE HXTM technology. Both work to up-scale compressed audio to near-Hi-Res levels. These TVs also support H.265/HEVC (High Efficiency Video Coding) video compression standards, both of which are 4K compatible.

ULTRA HD RECORDING

Following up on the huge BRAVIA TV announcements, Sony also put out a new 4K-compatible Action Cam, the FDR-X1000V. Supporting high bitrate video recording at 4K/30p (100 Mbps), it comes equipped with advanced SteadyShot technology and advanced reduction of wind noise.

The Handycam series had also been given an update as the new FDR-AX33 4K Handycam camcorder is around 30% smaller and 20% lighter than the current model. It is the first of this range to be equipped with Balanced Optical SteadyShot technology, ensuring the suppression of blurriness during all modes of shooting.

AUDIOPHILE HEAVEN

Beyond video, Sony also had a few audio devices on show. First up is the Walkman NW-ZX2, an update from the 2013 release. Slated as the latest high-end entry into the ZX series. It improves on overall audio performance by featuring a new rigid chassis design that achieves a higher-quality sound and has up to 33-hours of Hi-Res playback at 192 kHz/24 bit.

As for speakers, Sony bumped up its Hi-Res compatible line-up of products for the home user with the new SRS-X99 and SRS-X88 Wireless Speakers; HT-ST9, HT-NT3, and HT-XT3 Home Theatre Systems; and the STR-DN1060 and STR-DN860 Multi-Channel Integrated Amplifiers. All of the devices above will support wireless operation via SongPal Link, enabling simultaneous playback through multiple connected devices via Bluetooth. Surprise:

a prototype Hi-Res car audio player made its appearance at CES as well.

WEARABLE TECH

Wearables are a big deal for Sony as it introduced some new SmartWear prototypes. Chief among these are the Smart B-Trainer - an all-in-one, lightweight, headset-style device made for runners and equipped with essential running sensors and music playback capabilities.

There is also the first ever public exhibition of the 'SmartEyeglass Attach!' concept. Made for sports use, it uses an attachable Single Lens Display Module that was revealed in December 2014. This module, outfitted with Sony's unique OLED technology and capable of integrating into third-party eyewear products, joins the SmartEyeglass transparent lens eyewear that Sony introduced into the world of wearables.

LIFE'S SPACE

Rounding out Sony's presence at CES is the new Life Space UX concept - a re-imagining of experiencing and making the most of living spaces. Sony is moving forward with the commercialisation of a number of Life Space UX prototypes, beginning with the 4K Ultra Short Throw Projector that, when place at the foot of a wall, transforms the entire wall into a life-size window that feels like moving into another world - all via a 147in projection.

Other Life Space UX products include the LED Bulb speaker - a bulb-shaped speaker that doubles as a functional light bulb; improved Portable Ultra Short Throw Projector - a compact cube-shaped projector measuring approximately 10cm per side that is capable of throwing a 50in image; and three Symphonic Light concepts - yet another type of audio-emitting light fixture that can fill a room with crystal clear sound. PC

4K Ultra Short Throw Projector

The New Era of PC Gaming

Tonnes of gamer gear from MSI

by sia zhen ning

Gaming juggernauts MSI went to Vegas with a full assortment of gaming notebooks, All-in-One (AiO) PCs, and various hardware. This figurative flexing of muscles has led to some really impressive systems being shown during CES.

MOBILE WONDER

Let's start with the gaming. First, the reveal of MSI GE62 Apache - the next-gen in affordable gaming. Featuring an NVIDIA GTX 900M (965M or 970M) graphics, a dual exhaust system, SteelSeries gaming keyboard and more, it comes with a new design that improves battery life by up to 46%, weighs around 2kgs, and measures at only 1.14in.

Following the Apache is the GS30 Shadow and the Gaming Dock. Dubbed 'the ultimate gaming ecosystem', this literal '2-in-1' is an insanely powerful gaming machine at home and an ultra-portable unit on-the-go. The GS30 Shadow comes in at 0.77in, weighs less than 1.5kg, and the first to claim the title as World's 1st eGPU solution, which supports desktop graphics with a PCIe 3.0 x16 full bandwidth slot.

The crown jewel in MSI's arsenal goes to the GT80 Titan SLI. Toated as the world's first gaming notebook with an integrated SteelSeries mechanical gaming keyboard, it features Cherry MX Brown switches and is the first ever mobile gaming platform to be armed with dual NVIDIA GTX 980M GPUs in SLI. The oversized chassis also allows for easy upgrade of components, including the dual NVIDIA MXM graphics cards, when needed. It also rocks four M.2 SATA SSDs in RAID 0, 32GB RAM, and a super-efficient dual-fan cooling system that draws heat from both GPU and CPU via the 8-heat pipes it uses.

FANCY MULTI-MODES

As for AiOs, MSI has shown off two brand new categories at CES. First is the AG240 AiO 4K Gaming PC - the world's first ever AiO Gaming PC with Ultra HD display. This hyper-dense panel features a variety of cutting-edge gaming components like the three mSATA SSDs at RAID 0, the new Intel CPU along with NVIDIA GeForce 900M GPUs, as well as MSI's Anti-Flicker and Less Blue Light technologies.

Next up is the AP16 Flex AiO PC. While the AP16 doesn't have the ludicrous hardware of the AG240, it is still not your typical AIO as it can easily interchange between being an AiO PC or a tablet PC
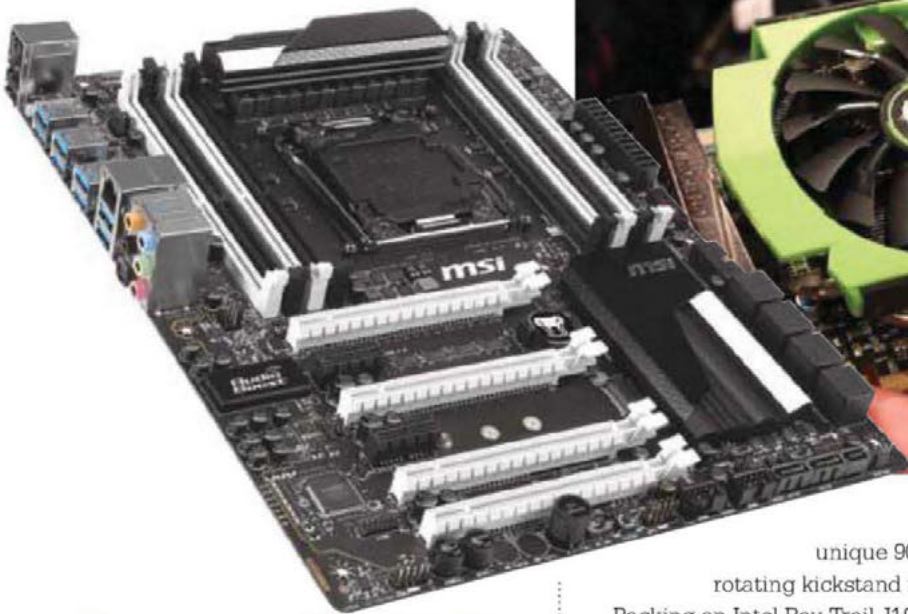
via the unique 90-degrees rotating kickstand it uses. Packing an Intel Bay Trail J1900 Quad Core CPU, an LED backlight panel, and fanless design - the AP16 Flex is perfectly suited for both commercial and household environments.

POWERED INNARDS

Three MSI motherboards also made its rounds - first being the X99A GAMING 9 ACK Motherboard. An International CES Innovations 2015 Design and Engineering Awards Honoree, the X99A entry is another world first as it features USB 3.1

for insane transfer speeds, as well as the Killer DoubleShot Pro technology that combines Killer LAN and Killer Wi-Fi AC. Additionally, it also is packed with an arsenal of features such as Streaming Engine, Turbo M.2 32 Gb/s, Audio Boost 2, and 4-way SLI support.

Next on the highlights is the Z97A Gaming 6 - another world's first holder thanks to the USB Type-C ports it uses. The new connector is the future in connectivity. Type-C ports will allow us to connect the next generation of USBs and video devices through an easy-to-use connector. With it, you can blindly plug any device in because it even allows for upside down jacking.

Rounding up MSI's motherboard entries for CES is the X99S SLI Krait Edition. Designed for powerful computing, it delivers an arsenal of extreme features that ensures it is the perfect solution for those looking for a hyper-unique, feature-rich motherboard.

GPU wise, MSI reveals a special overclocked GTX 970 GAMING 100 Million Edition (GTX 970 GAMING 100ME) graphics with TWIN FROZR V cooler. Its release date coincides with the milestone celebration of having sold 100 million NVIDIA GPUs. Additionally, a new dual-fan graphics card cooler was showcased, featuring a black and white scheme that covers a new distinctive design. The improved chassis perfectly matches both the Z97S and X99 SLI Krait Edition motherboards, enabling case-modders and enthusiasts to obtain a full MSI black/white setup when a need arises. PC
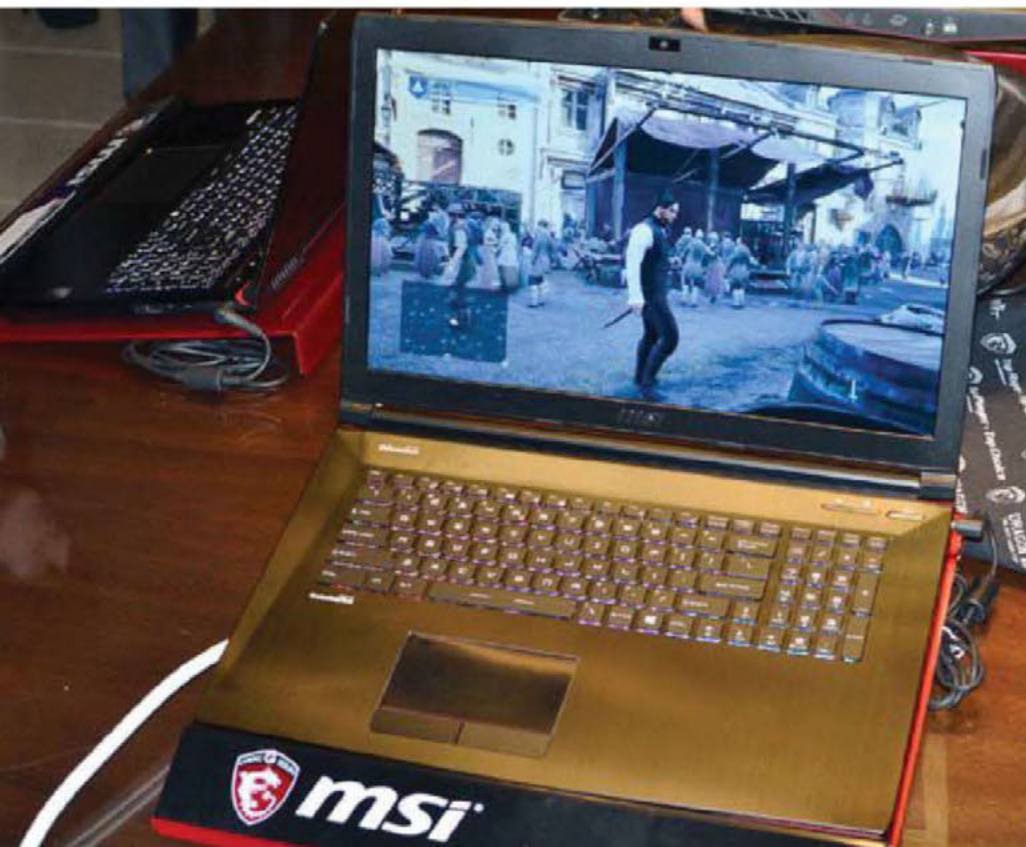
Glitzy CES 2015

Be in awe of gadgets and gizmos   by matthew yap

While there are special pages dedicated to major brands, PC.com tries to not miss out on anything if possible. Hence why the team has made a specific compilation of popular and favourites in these pages. Now let's get into it!

HUAWEI

Huawei isn't missing out on CES 2015 for sure as it showcases a variety of products like its flagship smartphones, wearables, tablets, mobile access devices, home access devices, smart home devices, Over-The-Top content, and vehicle-mounted modules. What's new in the extensive list is the Hilink, a strategy that Huawei is rolling out as part of its integrated mobile Internet solutions.

Richard Yu, CEO of Huawei Consumer BG, explained that smartphone sales saw significant increase, with the Ascend P7 and Mate 7 particularly popular among customers. He states: "We are committed to further consolidating and strengthening our smartphone business and will continue to bring people an integrated, intelligent experience." In addition, Yu reveals how Huawei is keen to explore the car networking business and have been researching on the Internet of Things (IoT).

There had been a tonne of Huawei products on display, including the P7 and Mate 7, along with the Huawei Honor 6 and 6 Plus. While all three are high-end Huawei smartphones that had been released in 2014, many still flock over to see what the fuss is about.

Besides smartphones, Huawei also organised sessions that share on its Hilink Solution - an idea that fully integrates mobile Internet solutions. Mostly related to IoT, the platform will be deployable in a home environment with products that are networked with one another. This goes beyond smartphones and other mobile devices, as it includes media and storage devices and even household products. IoT, which is the name of the game for CES 2015, is a huge highlight for Huawei.

Other products on display include the MediaPad T1 and X1, TalkBand B1, E5 PRO mobile access device, PT500 and WS331C home access devices, as well as the OT-based M330 and vehicle-mounted module ME909Tu-565. The last two work to demonstrate the Huawei Hilink Solution.
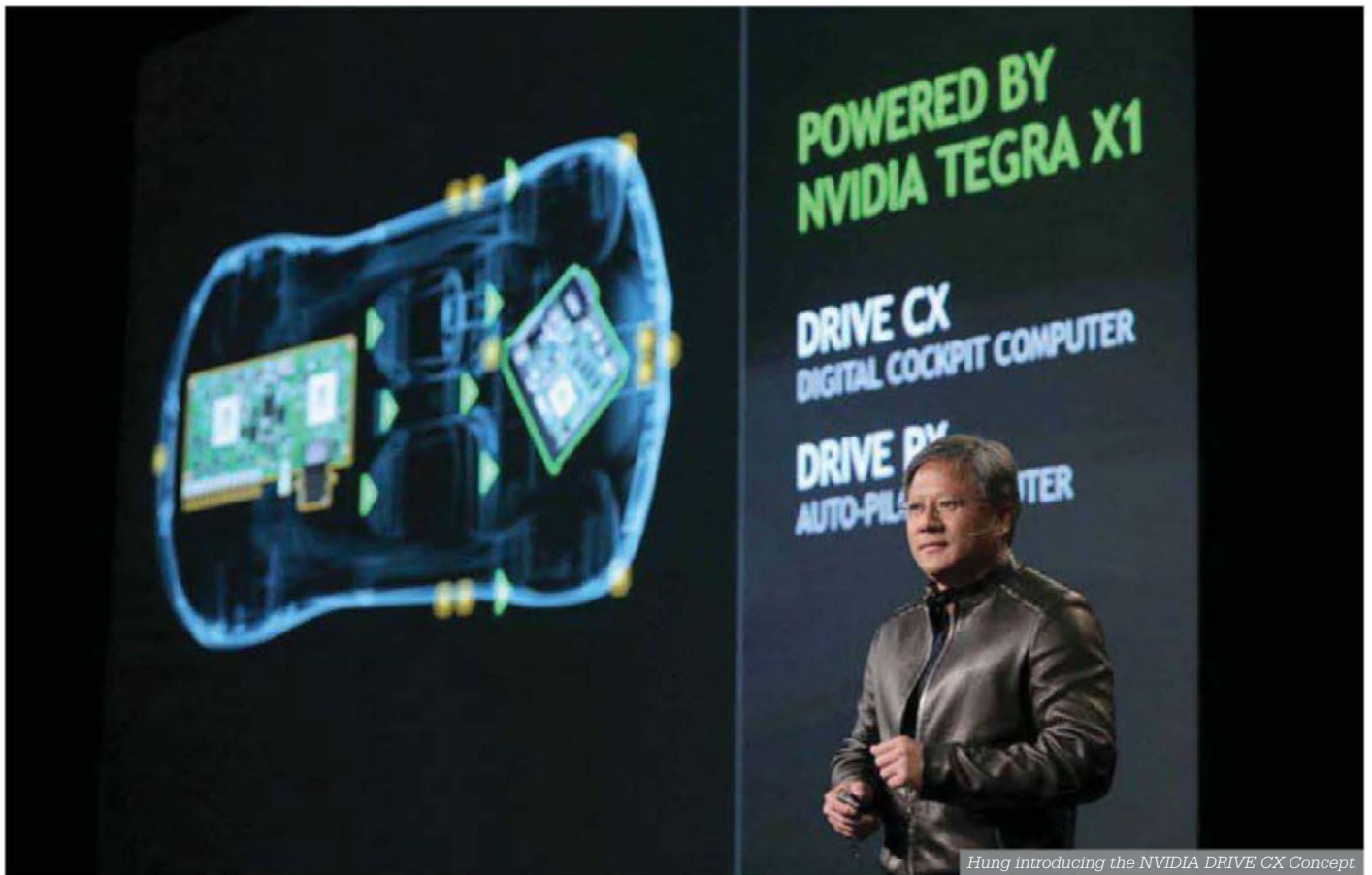
Hung introducing the NVIDIA DRIVE CX Concept.
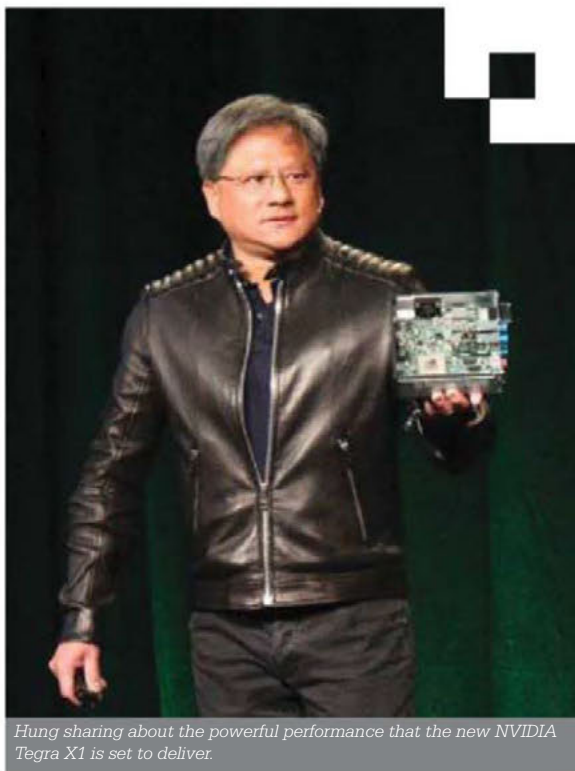
Hung sharing about the powerful performance that the new NVIDIA Tegra X1 is set to deliver.

NVIDIA

CES 2015 is, indeed, off to a great start as NVIDIA CEO Jen-Hsun Huang reveals the company's new Tegra X1 chip. Based on the Maxwell architecture, the Tegra X1 has twice the performance of the Tegra K1 and is also two times more energy efficient (according to GFXBench 3.0). It's the world's first 1 Teraflops mobile chip that operates on a 256-core GPU plus 8-core CPU combo; in Huang's own words: "It's a mobile super chip!"

"Wait, what? I don't understand! English, please!"

Basically, it means that with the Tegra X1, games that normally run on a PC architecture now have the potential of bringing that PC experience to mobile platforms!

During the press conference, Hung also showed a simulated demo of a smartphone rendering a video made using an Unreal Engine 4 element called 'Elemental'.

Of course, that's not all there is to the story. Hung also envisioned the Tegra X1 as the beginning of NVIDIA's role as the brains of a car - what he likes to call the company's new 'Digital Cockpit Computer'. It's going to be powered by the Tegra X1 chip and is able to process and produce 16.6MP of visual data – more or less the equivalent of four HD displays or two 4K displays at 60Hz. All of this isn't in the immediate future, but surely Hung feels it would be made available in the coming decade, if not sooner.

The rest of the conference consisted of demos and explanation on the new Drive CX and Drive PX, both new platforms that are meant to empower future on-board digital solutions for the automotive industry.

ASUS

If there is one wonder that will not stay quiet in this year's CES, it has to be ASUS as the Taiwanese manufacturer announced a complete range of gaming products at CES 2015. This includes ASUS' famed Republic of Gamers (ROG) series as well as the new STRIX series.

One major announcement is the ROG Swift PG27AQ 4K IPS 27in, a 27in IPS LED gaming monitor that has a very thin bezel but heavy visual processing prowess. In fact, it has native support for 4K gaming and can work seamlessly with NVIDIA's G-SYNC technology. Aside from that, there is also a new display panel that could potentially become a more mainstream choice soon - the ASUS MG279Q WQHD gaming monitor. A 27in IPS LED monitor as well, it comes packing with a 2K resolution (2560x1440) and 120Hz refresh rate instead.

For PCs, ASUS revealed the powerful ROG G20 compact gaming desktop PC, a compact entry that comes with a 4th Generation Intel Core i7 processor and a NVIDIA GTX 980 GPU. Last on the non-accessory list is the ROG GR8 console-size gaming PC, another compact gaming PC made to look like a good-looking console. Powering this PC is an Intel Core i7 CPU, NVIDIA GTX 750Ti GPU, and also 16GB DDR3 RAM.

Beyond gaming, there is also the new iterations of ASUS Transformer Books - namely the Chi T300, Chi T100, and Chi T90. The first two are updates of the current Transformer Book while the latter is a whole new category for that range.

As for overclockers and enthusiasts, ASUS had the ROG Enthusiast SLI Bridge on display, a customised ASUS SLI Bridge with the ROG logo done up with an aluminium finish. There are also new advance peripherals that are set to whet the appetites of gamers like the ROG Whetstone and STRIX Glide Control, or Glide Speed gaming mouse pads.

Wait, there's more! Say hi to the ROG Spatha and ROG Sica, plus the new STRIX Claw gaming mice. Keyboard warriors may also enjoy typing and gaming on the STRIX Tactic Pro mechanical keyboard as it sports a large number of macro keys. Looking for a new gaming headset to take your game to the next level? Try the STRIX 7.1 - a true surround gaming headset.

Indeed, if getting the best gaming setup is your desire in 2015, then ASUS has a whole range of new products waiting for you.

On the mobile front, ASUS has introduced two new flagships - the 4GB loaded ZenFone 2 and Optical Zoom powered/laser sight loaded ZenFone Zoom. Both are set to appear in 2015.

Jonney Shih, ASUS' Chairman, introducing the new capabilities of the ZenFone 2.

BLACKBERRY

BlackBerry has its fair share of CES 2015 excitement as well with the release of its BlackBerry Passport. Designed for productivity in mind, the new BlackBerry is a 4.5in smartphone with a square-shaped touch screen that packs a QWERTY keyboard on it and fully operates on the company's latest BB 10.3.1 OS.

President for Devices and Emerging Solutions at BlackBerry, Ron Louks, explains the design concept of the new device saying: "It is built with security at its core. This is how the BlackBerry Passport stands apart from the rectangular-screen, all-touch devices in the market today. In fact, we're offering users more than a full day of battery life and new innovations like the industry's first touch-enabled QWERTY keyboard."

Beyond the US, availability elsewhere is currently unknown. Even so, BlackBerry reveals that there will be more 2015 announcements. As it is, BlackBerry fans from Malaysia will be hoping this comes to our shores soon or there will be many sad faces indeed.

BlackBerry's other major announcement is the Cloud-based Internet of Things (IoT) platform. By using the company's tech portfolio, BlackBerry intends to bring top class security and reliability to IoT applications as the transformative

trend continues to seemingly gain momentum. The platform is based on the BlackBerry-owned QNX Software Systems's mission-critical embedded systems with BlackBerry's own secure network infrastructure and device lifecycle management software.

By combining the two platforms, BlackBerry Technology Solutions VP of Strategy and Marketing, Matt Hoffman, says that the company has built a cloud-based platform that is modular and scalable. "Looking ahead, we will extend the platform with other BlackBerry technologies to give developers additional control over the flow of information to devices on the network's edge," he adds.

To start things off with this new tech, BlackBerry revealed its new Mobile HBox, a device that will capture and transmit medical information between a patient, his/her doctor, and a point of care. Beyond that, BlackBerry has also announced the availability of BlackBerry Messenger for Android Wear users.

ZTE

The people from ZTE had a few things to share in CES 2015 as well. Considering that the Chinese manufacturer is fourth in the US phone ranking, it most likely saw the need to show something big to the fans there. Thus, ZTE brought a few new

Patrick Soon-Shiong, NantHealth CEO, discussing about the wonders of HBox.

smartphones and also a portable projector for all to see at the annual event.

First up is the US-limited device - the ZTE Grand X Max+, a 6in phone with a 720p display. If that's not exciting enough for you, ZTE also revealed the ZTE Nubia Z7 - a flagship smartphone with some popular bells and whistles like dual-SIM, 2K 1440 x 2560 display, camera with optical image stabilisation, the powerful Snapdragon 801 chipset and 3GB RAM. Lastly is the ZTE Star 2, featuring a 1080p 5in display a Snapdragon 801 chip as well. At a slim 6.9mm wide, the latter is ZTE's midrange successor to the Star 1.

Additionally, there is the Spro, a version two variant that is simply named as ZTE Spro 2. This portable projector is based on Android and features advanced Wi-Fi hotspot functionalities. Since it's based on Android, you can access the Google Play store on the Spro 2 just like any other Android device. This allows you to stream content through various apps or via storage media, such as microSD cards or a USB drive. It also works with HDMI cables or Wi-Fi connections as well, if PCs or media consoles (Android TV anyone?) are yout preferred modes of playback.

Pairing its auto focus and auto keystone functions with a great short throw distance and improved 720p resolution, the Spro 2 can easily project onto a 120in screen with 200 lumens brightness. Plus, when used as a Wi-Fi hotspot, it can support up to eight devices. Battery life shouldn't be an issue either as it uses a large 6300mAh lithium ion battery.

Jeff Yee, ZTE USA VP - Technology Planning and Partners, introducing the new ZTE Grand X Max+ at CES 2015.

PANASONIC

The Panasonic showfront at CES this year saw a variety of different new things, most of which are relevant to consumers. Among them are the new headphones entries, advanced Lumix cameras, innovative camcorders, a new SDXC/SDHC format, and home entertainment products.

Audio-wise, Panasonic adds to its line-up two new Drops 360' premium in-ear monitors - the Drops 360' Luxe RP-HJX20 and Drops 360' RP-HJX5. They come with large sound drivers to provide more power and tighter bass. Travel a lot? Then you may be interested in the Panasonic FOLDZ RP-DJS150M - an ultra-compact headphone. Not only is it compatible with all major smartphones, which allow you to answer calls, it can also be easily packed and stored away without taking up much space. Of course, the wire-free club would enjoy Panasonic's new RP-BTD5 Bluetooth Wireless Headphone. It's NFC-compatible, promising one-touch pairing with smart devices and is set to deliver great audio quality with its 40mm Neodymium Magnet-powered drivers.

Next up - Lumix cameras. Enter the LUMIX SZ10, a thin enough snapper that is able to fit in the pocket of your suit or handbag, or the LUMIX ZS50 and LUMIX ZS45 premium compacts, both of which ensure great photo-taking thanks to its powerful optical zoom, Leica lenses, and with an assortment of features that would make pros salivate. Extreme sports lovers can go for the Panasonic LUMIX TS6 and TS30 – made specifically to be waterproof, freeze-proof, shock-proof, and dustproof. Purposefully made for the active and adventurous, these camera are set to deliver excellent image quality regardless of any given conditions it is used in.

For those on the lookout for new Full HD camcorders, do consider the HC-W570, HC-V270, and HC-V160 – three new camcorders in the Panasonic stable that offers 50x optical zoom and image stabilisation. Or perhaps the HC-WX970, HC-VX870, and HC-V770 would fit as it has amazing new Full HD recording

capabilities with a High Dynamic Range (HDR) Movie feature.

Of course, there must be something to save all those images and videos. The files need to be transferred fast as well. Enter the new line-up of UHS-I type SDXC/SDHC

memory cards! Panasonic claims these new cards will have maximum read speed of 95MB/s and write speed of 90MB/s and offer capacities of up to 128GB. Huge and speedy - what the world has demanded for made into reality. PC

Lenovo's Vegas Showcase

by sia zhen ning

Lenovo introduces its new catalogue to the Strip

L enovo has been hard at work as it seems its entire catalogue - ranging for tablets to smartphones - have had an upgrade. Those as well as brand new All-in-Ones (AiOs) and notebooks - all these and more had been on display at CES 2015. Without further ado, let's go through Lenovo's mountain of technology.

RAZOR THIN CARBON

Lenovo had not overlooked Ultrabooks as it has been hard at work with its ThinkPad line. First off is the ThinkPad X1 Carbon - specifically the third generation version for this particular Ultrabook. Announced as the 'lightest 14in performance notebook in the world', the new X1 Carbon comes with advanced options like a super bright Full HD display and a PCIe Solid State Drive. All that while still weighing under 1.5kgs and putting out a longer battery life than its predecessors. The Ultrabook itself is powered by an Intel 5th Generation Core CPU - the primary reason it can offer such long lasting performance efficiently.

YOGA REVISED

What is a Lenovo showcase if it doesn't feature the YOGA series of convertible tablets. CES saw a slew of new YOGA iterations that is made for various purposes. First on the list is the new YOGA 3. Coming in either 11in or 14in models, the YOGA 3 provides a bigger screen while still maintaining a slim form factor. The trademark YOGA hinge design is retained here while being powered with an Intel Broadwell CPU.
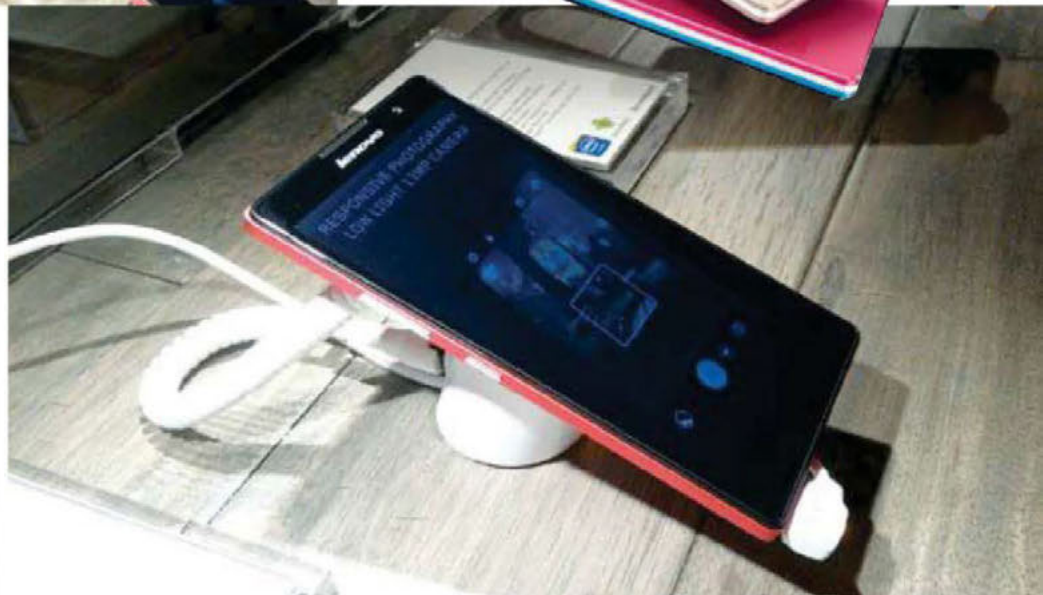
If business performance is a necessity, then the ThinkPad YOGA is tailor-made for you. Built for small offices, home office types, and students - it comes in 12in, 14in and 15in sizes. While it maintains the form factor of the original YOGA, it also adds a few new features, such as the new Intel RealSense 3D camera system and Lenovo SHAREit app.

Lastly, the 8in YOGA Tablet 2 with Windows had been displayed on the CES showfloor as well. Continuing the tradition of YOGA tablets, the YOGA Tablet 2 with Windows rocks the AnyPen Technology, allowing any pen or pencil to become a handwriting tool. This removes

and weighing less than 1.8kg, this new thin and light S Series notebook comes with a Broadwell-type Generation Intel Core i7 processor, an NVIDIA GeForce Graphics, and 1TB SSHD.

HANDHELD AUGMENTATION

Moving on to the smartphone section, Lenovo introduced a series of new smartphones and some gadgets. First up is the Lenovo P90. Designed to provide the power and performance that ensures users can go fast and get things done, the P90 is the first smartphone to utilise the combination of the newest 64-bit Intel Atom Z3560 processor with an Intel 5-mode XMM 7262 modem.

The Vibe series also received a new entry as Lenovo unveiled the VIBE X2 Pro. Sporting the same eye-catching, award-winning layered design of the Lenovo X2, this limited edition smartphone brings craftsmanship, power, and style to the next level with its sleek, lightweight full-metal body. The VIBE X2 Pro packs a 5.3in Full HD display and a 64-bit Qualcomm Snapdragon Octa-Core processor, allowing it to deliver jaw-dropping performance while maintaining a long-lasting battery life. **PC**

the requirement of having a stylus on hand. Lasting up to 15 hours on a single charge, the YOGA Tablet 2 with Windows comes packed with an Intel Atom CPU.

FLEXIBILITY AND PORTABILITY

ThinkPads and YOGAs aren't the only devices on show as Lenovo brought out its new FLEX 3 as well. An ideal entry convertible notebook, the FLEX 3 now comes with a 360° hinge and comes powered with either an Intel 5th Generation CPU or the newly released Pentium processor. If conventional notebooks are more in demand then the thin, powerful and stylish 14in S41 will be more appropriate. Measuring just 19.5mm thin

Painting CES Blue

Korean tech giants Samsung brought its A-Game to CES

by sia zhen ning

Samsung has had a busy, busy CES this year. From new products to its pitches regarding the Internet of Things (Iot), Samsung has went all out to convince consumers that 2015 will be the year where technology changes. There is, indeed, a veritable mountain load of information from the Korean company to share on.

NEW PANEL CONTROLS

First off, let's start with Samsung's visual department. For TVs, Samsung has some rather surprising news. Starting from 2015, all Samsung Smart TV lines will adopt the Tizen operating system (OS). This standardised open-source platform enables flexibility with even more content and devices, allowing developers to easily create compatible content while connecting users to a world of limitless entertainment.

Further changes to Samsung Smart TV ranges include the redesigned Smart Hub, as well as the ease of syncing other devices to the TVs. Integrated entertainment experiences such as Samsung Sports Live, PlayStation Now, Milk Video, and many more are also available on Samsung Smart TVs.

Besides TVs, Samsung has also brought its latest curve monitors to the CES showfloor. The SE790C is Samsung's newest and most advanced curved monitor as the 34in entry features an optimised curvature design, an ultra-wide quad high definition (ULTRA-WQHD) resolution, and a superior contrast ratio that offers enhanced productivity and entertainment functionality within a sophisticated and ergonomic design.

Alongside the SE790C, Samsung has also announced that it intends to expand this line of curved monitors with the upcoming 32in SE590C.

Further pushing the boundaries of visual fidelity, Samsung has pulled back the curtains on its new line of SUHD TVs. Utilising Samsung's proprietary, eco-friendly nano-crystal technology and intelligent SUHD re-mastering picture quality engine, Samsung SUHD TVs demonstrate ground-breaking advancements in contrast, brightness, colour reproduction and detail, to deliver an overall superior picture quality experience. This is further enhanced with

a stylish curved design and its Smart TV capabilities that will also see Tizen being included.

SOUND UPDATES

The audio department in Samsung also has new updates as the Koreans revealed the WAM7500/6500 speakers. These new sound platforms are considered as a new concept for Samsung as they provide a rich-bodied sound experience no matter where the users are in relation to the product.

According to reports, the WAM7500/6500 had been partly developed at Samsung's new state-of-the-art audio lab in Valencia, California and uses premium materials across the exterior of the speakers, allowing it to stylishly blend in with any home décor. It will be released in two variants - Stand-Type (WAM7500) and Movable-Type (WAM6500). Samsung

has also announced that it will unveil the world's first TV matching Curved Soundbar line-up sometime mid-2015.

SMART APPLIANCES

Not all of Samsung's products are limited to the audio-visual department as it introduced some innovative appliances at CES - bringing a dash of futurism into daily tasks. In fact, Samsung is moving into Phase 2 of its Chef Collection project as it puts out new appliances into the kitchen. This includes the new Flex Duo Oven Range that now comes with Dual Door - allowing users to simultaneously cook two different dishes in two separate compartments at different temperatures with little transfer of aroma and taste. There is also the Samsung Chef Collection Slide-In Induction Range with Virtual Flame Technology, an induction system that features LED lighting embedded beneath a glass cooktop to cast a reassuring flame-like glow onto pots and pans when in use. Finally, there is the new counter depth version of the T9000 Refrigerator as well.

If domestic chores are the more preferred, Samsung addresses that as

well with its newest robot vacuum, the POWERbot VR9000. Featuring an array of advanced technologies and functions, it will do all the heavy lifting cleaning work for today's busy households - from hardwood to carpet. Using Samsung's patented Digital Inverter Motor and CycloneForce technology, the POWERbot VR9000's cleaning prowess is unprecedented for most robot vacuums.

Washing machines are also getting an upgrade as Samsung launched its Activewash washing machine. The top of the Activewash includes a built-in sink with water jet and gentle scrubbing surface, allowing users to handle the entire wash process in the laundry unit instead of having to spread it out over multiple locations. This avoids any unwanted mess and saves a considerable amount of effort. 🅟🅒

Get Skinny

Dell goes all-slim on its 2015 products

by sia zhen ning

D ell's running theme for CES this year seems to be making its products even thinner as two of their products are quoted to be "the thinnest devices in the world".

SLICK CUTS

Kicking off the Dell slim down is the new Dell XPS 13 notebook. Described as the 'smallest 13in notebook in the world', the XPS 13 is designed to be ultra-slim and extremely light in weight. Using a 13in Ultra Sharp Quad HD+ (3200x1800) touch display on an 11 inch chassis, it reinforces the sleek form factor and makes the notebook almost edgeless. Thrumming within is Intel's 5th Generation Core processor, an SSD drive, and power optimisation tools. The latter is the one Dell uses to push the battery life of the new XPS 13 to around 15 hours of use on a single charge.

The second part of the slim device line that Dell wanted to show-off is the Dell Venue 8 7000 Android tablet. Dell dubbed it as the thinnest tablet in the world as it is 20% thinner than the iPad Mini Retina and measures 9% slimmer in comparison to the Samsung Galaxy Tab S. This super-slim chassis can be attributed to the tablet's edge-to-edge 8.4in OLED display, allowing its form-factor to be ultra-sleek. To heat things up, this tablet also comes packing with an Intel RealSense camera - the first consumer device to do so, providing one-of-a-kind comprehensive depth data detection for the new Dell Venue.

ALIENWARE STATUS

Besides being given the skinny, Dell has also updated its Alienware series of gaming notebooks as it refreshes the Alienware 15 and 17 with brand new NVIDIA Maxwell-type GPUs, AKA the GeForce GTX 900 series.

With the new graphics, Dell is able to reduce the overall thickness of both the Alienware 15 and 17 notebooks by 20%. Dell has also paired them with its Alienware Graphics Accelerator, a proprietary external graphics solution that allows users to boost the visual performance of these notebooks with a desktop discrete GPU. The Alienware 15 will be further upgraded by implementing an UltraHD 4K LCD display to take advantage of the graphical upgrades, making it the first 4K notebook in the Alienware line.

INSPIRING UPGRADES

Not neglecting the Inspiron series, Dell also shared how its current Inspiron range will be getting new additions as well as upgrades. Unveiled during CES is the new Inspiron 15 7000 series, featuring an Intel 5th Generation Core processor and 4K Ultra HD touch display.

Dell also plans to add Intel's RealSense 3D Camera Front F200 to the pre-existing Inspiron 15 5000 line and the Inspiron 23 All-in-One desktop. The Inspiron 15 5000 series will also boast the new 5th Generation Intel Core CPU, ensuring improved compute performance and

extended battery life. Not to fall short of its compatriots, even the Inspiron 13 7000 offering will sport a new design that rocks curved edges, a metal palm rest, and a diamond cut touchpad.

CURVED SCREEN

To cap off its super showcase, Dell put out its best-for-last device: the Dell UltraSharp 34 Monitor. First previewed at PAX Prime in August 2014, this new panel will be available for purchase from 8 January 2015 onwards. Featuring a 34in WQHD panoramic curved screen with a 21:9 aspect ratio, this beautifully sleek panel optimises its field of view to

minimise eye movement and deliver a more comfortable viewing experience to all. Complementing that is the rich and engaging sound experience, which its powerful 18W integrated speakers put out, and the advanced connectivity performance that it has - a feature that supports multiple monitors and peripherals to create a massive screen real estate. PC
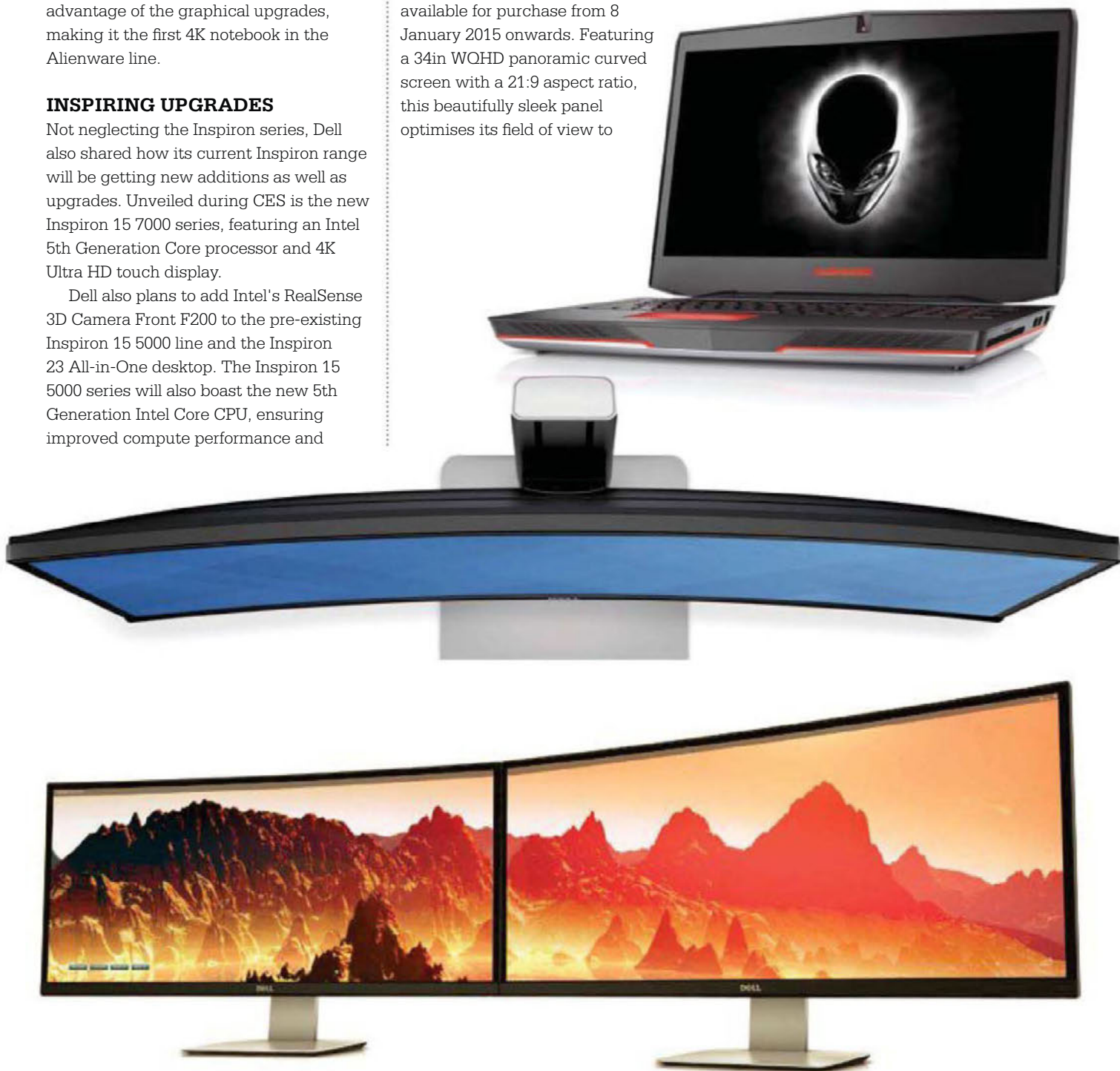
ASCENDING TECHNOLOGIES

The CES Quirkies

The weird, funny, and equally as innovative

by matthew yap

Brian Krzanich, CEO of Intel, showing off the AscTec Firefly when he shared about Intel RealSense.

CES is more than just gadgets, gizmos, and innovations. It also has to do with encountering the weird, odd, and downright silly. Both in the positive and negative aspects of technology, of course. Here are some concepts the PC.com team came across that inspired this oddball article.

ZBOARD 2

Ride-ables made a return in CES 2015 and boy there are plenty to choose from. The ZBoard first appeared on Kickstarter in 2012, showing the whole world that just maybe Marty McFly's future isn't as far off as we've thought it would be. At CES 2015 the new version of ZBoard showed up in two different flavours - the ZBoard 2 Blue and -Pearl. The Blue weights only about 7.3kg, making it the lightest model to date, whilst the Pearl will be able to travel farther. Both boast a top speed of 20mph

(that's miles) thanks to the new 500W motor and come with a splash-proof body, tail-lights and a battery indicator. As per Doc Brown's design!

SIXENSE STEM (SIXENSE TRACKING EMBEDDED MODULE)

Have you ever wondered how it's really like to swing a lightsaber? There is bound to be that one moment for sure. Thus, as VR technology continues to develop, people all over are curious about what they are able to do with it. The guys over at Sixense have the brilliant idea of making a motion controller that will work with VR

headsets. They call it 'The STEM'. At CES 2015, a demo by Sixense demonstrated how The STEM works as it allows you to 'feel' a lightsaber for real. Alright, time to save up for that and a VR headset!

ASCTEC FIREFLY WITH INTEL REALSENSE

Drones, drones everywhere! CES 2015 really made fans of flying drones giddy. One entry from Ascending Technologies got help from Intel to enhance the AscTec Firefly. With six RealSense cameras mounted to the top of the drone, plus a custom PCI-e board equipped with a small quad-core Intel Atom processor to run the

numbers, this sudden powerhouse can now be considered a real navigator that is great at dodging clumsy humans who would wander into the path of its blades of death. You could even play drone pong with it, if you want to. No, really.

THE BELFIE STICK

We all know the selfie stick - an accessory that caters to the hidden narcissist in all of us. But wait, did you say this is different? Every CES 2015, there are cool stuff and then there are stuff that are not so cool. The 'Belfie' stick is one of the latter. Basically, you clip your phone to this bendable stick, which can then be used to take a sexy shot of your posterior. No, this is not a joke. The makers from On.com claim that the first batch of belfie sticks have been sold out. If that's true, I despair for what the world is coming to.

3DHEAD

Virtual reality had been a big at CES 2015. While the trend had been one of the most anticipated, most did not expect the appearance of a VR helmet with the most bizarre design to date – the 3DHead. Funded through billionaire Alki David, the 3DHead is a 7in tablet powered 3D screen that can be slotted into a helmet to turn it into a VR headset. Wearing this heavy abomination makes one look like a Xenomorph, all but David feel that no one would be silly enough to get one of these.

GOGORO

While smart cars aren't new, there still has to be something new every year, right? Well, it is time to consider the Gogoro Smartscooter. Founded in 2011 through the efforts of Horace Luke and Matt Taylor, the Smartscooter concept uses an electric motor (duh!) that offers a top speed of 95km/h - certainly more than enough for city travel. Gogoro also promises that the Smartscooter is pollution-free: truly a bold boast. Unfortunately, who knows when it will come to Malaysia, if ever?

JINS MEME

Jins, an eyewear maker based in Japan, has created a smart eyewear with one prominent feature - to protect our vision.

While looking like normal glasses at first, the Jins Meme has Bluetooth, a six-axis accelerometer, gyroscope, and a metal electrooculography (EOG) sensor on the nose piece. In short, these will supposedly measure things like your posture or eye fatigue. Practical applications could involve being paired to a smartphone or a car, enabling them to send out alerts when you've been staring at a screen or driving for too long.

INTEL'S SPIDER

Voted as the "Most Eye-Catching" booth at CES 2015, Intel continues to show us that real life can be as strange as fiction. At Intel's show and tell section, there had been a 3D-printed "Smart Spider Dress" on show. Using an Intel Madison chip, which autonomously control the spider legs, the dress operates a self-defence mechanism that stabs out against anyone trying to get too close to the wearer. Its designer, Anouk Wipprecht, also says that the wearable will be able to sense and adapt to the wearer's emotions. Talk about tingling your Spider Senses… PC

2015 International CES
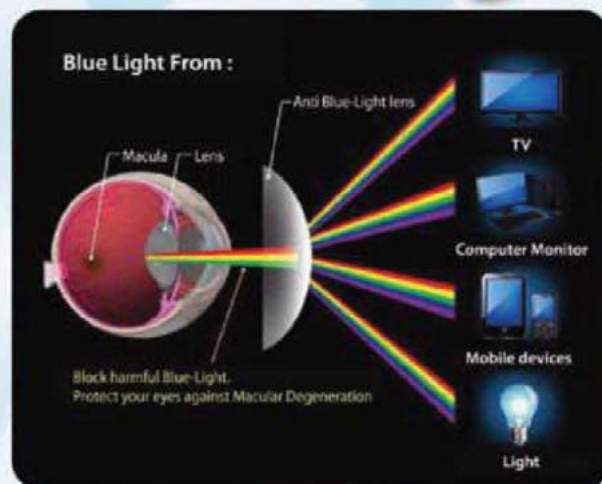
Razer Forges onto Android TV

by matthew yap

Gaming peripheral maker releases new Forge and Cortex: Stream

It's certainly a busy time at CES 2015 for Razer as it continues to introduce a slew of new releases. Front and centre is the Razer Forge TV- a system that the gaming peripheral brand will use to bring a new level of depth into gaming on the Android platform.

With the reveal, Razer shares how it will offer some amazing performance ratings for its Razer Forge TV as the device comes with a Qualcomm Snapdragon 805 chipset, Quad-Core Krait 450 CPU - with each core tuned at 2.5GHz - an Adreno 420 GPU, and 2GB RAM. These hard-core specs ensures high-end gaming and high-resolution content can be seamlessly processed on the micro-console. Of course, games are more fun when there are friends to play or share with. Thus, this platform supports up to four controllers and has a huge collection of content and apps made readily available thanks to the Google Play store that can connected to your TV via Google Cast.

This attempt at the Android TV is so extreme that it managed to land two awards - "Best Gaming Product" from CES 2015's official award partner Engadget and the "People's Choice" award. These accolades fully reflect the amount of excitement and innovation that Razer has put into developing this concept.

Next, the Razer Serval that serves (Hah, I see what you did there Razer!). With this Bluetooth gaming controller, you get to play any Android TV game or mobile game wherever you like via the device's phone clip. The Serval can pair with four unique devices, so you can switch from Razer Forge TV to your mobile, tablet, or PC without needing extra controllers.

Beyond those two are the Razer Cortex: Stream - a new feature to Razer's 'Cortex' launcher platform, and the Razer Turret. With the former, Razer promises the low latency that users have been demanding for years when they stream content. The latter is closer to traditional Razer, as it comprises a wireless gaming mouse and 'lapboard' combo that can be used from the comforts of the couch.

Most of these Razer products will be available at Razer's online store within Q1 of 2015, while the Cortex: Stream add-on will have its beta around Q2 2015. Pricing are shown in the attached box. 🄿🄲

Razer Forge TV
Price: Razer Store -
US$99.99 / €99.99
$149.99 / €149.99
(Forge TV and Serval Controller Bundle)

Razer Cortex: Stream
Price: Razer Store -
US$39.99 / €34.99
(Included free with)
- The Razer Forge TV and Serval Controller Bundle
- The Razer Serval controller
- The Razer Turret lapboard

Razer Serval
Price: Razer Store -
US$79.99 / €79.99

Razer Turret
Price: Razer Store -
US$129.99 / €129.99
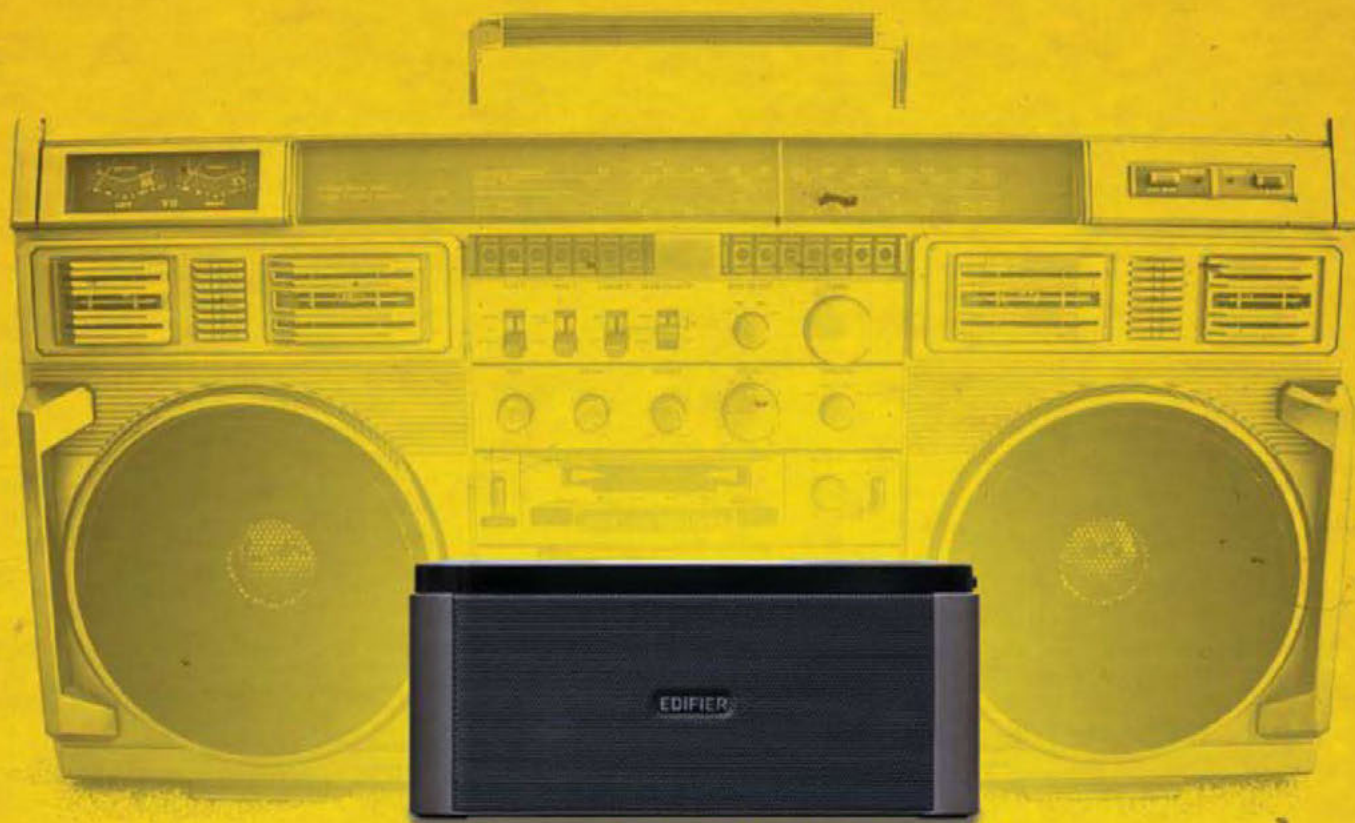
Life is Good

LG's Jack-of-all-Trades showing at CES   by sia zhen ning

There is a little bit of everything at LG's CES showing. Besides smartphones, there was also TVs, home appliances, and even product/services that deal with the Internet of Things (IoT).

ULTRA HD IMAGERY

You can't have an LG showing without talking about displays. Thus, this CES is no different as LG has brought the latest in 4K TVs and monitors to the showfloor. Let's begin with LG's forte - TVs. LG has revealed not one, not three, but seven new 4K OLED TVs - the biggest being the 77in panel.

Indeed, the new range of TVs come in various shapes - curved, flat, and one that can switch between both as well. Accompanying all the new 4K OLED TVs is LG's own 'Art Slim' technology, allowing these displays to feature ultra-slim chassis designs. Also included is LG's proprietary WRGB technology - a new innovation that adds a fourth colour - white - to the otherwise typical three colour system.

OLED TVs aside, LG has also revealed two new 4K LCD TVs into its portfolio with both featuring LG's new ColourPrime technology.

4K isn't just limited to TVs as LG is bringing the UHD concept to monitors as well. Part of the rollout includes the LG 31MU97, the first 'true 4K' resolution monitor. Offering a resolution of 4,096 x 2,160 pixels, this makes it the first 4K display that doesn't utilise the standard 3,840 x 2,160 resolution all current 4K panels offer. Additionally, three separate monitors - all of them with a 21:9 aspect ratio - had also been revealed alongside the 31MU97.

THE INTERNET OF LG

Like Samsung, LG is also betting big on the IoT as it announced that its new TVs will be IoT ready by way of including WebOS 2.0. LG has revealed that it intends to combine WebOS 2.0 powered Smart TVs with a new 'wellness platform', home automation, and even automotives.

LG has also shared of how it will be expanding WebOS to power its signage

and hotel-type TVs, allowing customers to experience the true value of IoT outside of their own homes. Besides TVs, LG is actively developing Vehicle to Everything (V2X) technologies in an attempt to bring IoT into cars. Part of its efforts include moving to push for more companies to embrace an open standard framework for IoT, so as to increase the rate of growth in how the new trend is implemented within everyone's daily lives.

CURVE REVISITED

LG continues to curve its smartphone as well when it introduced the successor to the G Flex. Aptly named the G Flex 2, this smartphone is subtler on the curve aspect while being slightly smaller than the original in order to address the usability issues present on the original G Flex.

The G Flex 2 is also more durable than its predecessor as the internals are made to be further flexible, allowing it to distribute the shock from drops or pressure more evenly across its body. LG's second generation self-healing plastic case allows it to recover from scratches and even bruises in less than 10 seconds, adding to its overall durability. Thrumming within is the Snapdragon 810, promising users that it'd be a beast in performance as well.

SIAMESE WASHING MACHINES

Appliances also made an appearance in LG's CES showcase as its new washing machine features the new Twin Wash system. This new idea sports a drawer that can be fit under any of the LG front-load washers, allowing it to handle smaller and more delicate clothes while the main unit works through an entirely different cycle. Aside from the Twin Wash system, LG has also shown its EcoHybrid Dryer - a heat recycling idea that offers a large bump in energy efficiency. This tech complements the TurboSteam models that sprays steam directly onto clothes for faster cycles. PC

New Workforce Enhancement

Dell introduces its newest line of products for the business market

by sia zhen ning

In line with reinforcing its commitment to the evolving workforce for the Asia Pacific region, Dell has revealed its latest range of client solution products, ranging from Ultrabooks to full-on desktop solutions.

For those who require mobility for their work, do consider the new Dell XPS 13 and the XPS 15. The former is the smallest 13in notebook in the world that comes with an Intel 5th Generation Intel Core processor and an UltraSharp Quad HD+ display. As for the latter, it comes with an UltraSharp 4K Ultra HD touch display as well to match trademark powerhouse performance that the XPS 15 line is known for.

As for tablets, Dell has the Dell Venue 11 Pro 7000 series to represent that line. First unveiled at Dell World 2014, the new Venue 11 Pro series is 15% thinner, has an extended battery life, and a travel keyboard to provide that full notebook experience. There is even an accompanying thin keyboard for extra ultra-portability.

In the 2-in-1 department, the new Dell Latitude 13 7000 series 2-in-1 puts on a showing as it combines a lightweight Ultrabook and a powerful 13in tablet into one device. All of that is powered with an Intel Core M processor.

Organisations focused on maintaining secure data ecosystems are also on Dell's sights as it rolled out the Dell OptiPlex 9030 and Dell OptiPlex 3030 - both featuring an Intel 4th Generation CPU and a wide variety of Dell security tools. This includes being Trusted Platform Module5 1.2 certified.

Complementing the PCs are the line-up of monitors that Dell unveiled as well. This includes the Dell Ultrasharp 27 UP2715K, the world's first 5K monitor; and the Dell Ultrasharp 34 U3415W, the industry's first 34in curved screen monitor. Designed mainly for colour-based processing and high-resolution imaging industries, as well as game and software developers, the former uses a 27in 16:9 ultra-HD 5K screen panel that delivers a screen resolution of 5120 x 2880. Of course, the latter rocks an ultra-wide 21:9 screen, providing WQHD performance and 3440x1440 resolution. PC

OPPO Contest
GIVEAWAY

The OPPO R5 is one of the thinnest smartphones in existence. How thin? Well, it had been named the thinnest smartphone in the world when it first appeared. Form factor aside, the R5 packs some need software such as the PI 2.0+ that allows the smartphone to take better photos. Complementing the R5 is OPPO's own VOOC Flash Charge Technology which charges the R5 to 75% battery capacity in just 30 minutes!

Does this pique your interest? You're in luck as PC.com is giving away an OPPO R5 to one lucky person! All you have to do is answer the following questions and complete a slogan. Who knows? You might just be walking away with a brand spanking new R5.

1. How thin is the OPPO R5?

2. What is the version of the PI engine implemented in the R5?

3. How long does it take for the VOOC Flash Charge Technology to charge the R5 to 75% battery capacity?

4. With OPPO, I can... (20 words or less)

PRIZES
1x OPPO R5

Name: _____ IC Number: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____ Contact Number: _____

MAIL YOUR ANSWERS BY 31 MARCH 2015 TO:
OPPO/PC.com Contest:
Reach Publishing, 15-3, Block F1, Dataran Prima,
Jalan PJU 1/42, 47301, Petaling Jaya
OR EMAIL US AT: editor.pcdc@reach.com.my.

Rules and Regulations:
Participants may only send in one entry per name* Reach Publishing Sdn Bhd and OPPO employees and their immediate families are not eligible for this contest* Any decision about the winners is final* All prizes must be collected in person or by representatives* Participants must be 18 and above*

Closing Date: 31 March 2015

Transform Your Living Room

New 3D projectors set for home cinemas

by matthew yap

(From Left) Grace Yang, Product Marketing Manager, BenQ Asia Pacific Corporation; Chaw; Eason Lu, Product Marketing Manager, BenQ Asia Pacific Corporation; and Jin Lim AKA YouTube Sensation JinnyBoy showing off the newly launched BenQ W1070+ and W1080ST+ Home Video Projectors.

Looking for projectors for a greater movie experience at home? Well, you're in luck because BenQ just launched two new 3D Home Projectors - the W1070+ and the W1080ST+. Thanks to the success of BenQ's current models, the company moved to launch the new models to ensure continued success in this market for the year 2015.

The main concern for projectors include factors like visual challenges in contrast, colour, and sharpness. To address this, the W1070+ and W1080ST+ uses a feature that BenQ calls 'Cinema Color Reality' - a function that renders more vivid colours through the augmentation of BenQ BrilliantColor technology. Thus, contrast is superb on both models.

Further complementing that is the 2200 ANSI lumen brightness it offers through the use of the DLP DarkChip3TM and DMD features. This ensures the W1070+ and the W1080ST+ can do enhanced 3D Full HD projection, adding a real sense of immersion to your living room entertainment.

Other major features include the 10W resonant chamber speaker system that provides crisp-clear audio quality and deep base tones through the SRS module. The W1070+ and the W1080ST+ also have an amazing short-throw distance of 2.5m and 1.5m respectively. Additionally, both have side-projection capability, meaning they can be placed off-centre and configured to look as if it is properly installed. Lastly, MHL cables and 3rd-party MHL dongles are included so you can stream content from your smart devices.

Chaw Foo Hong, General Manager of BenQ Malaysia, says that BenQ had foresaw a considerable market demand for Full HD home projectors and that the company intends to fulfil that demand with even more new models in the future.

"The W1070+ and the W1080ST+ are targeted at young parents seeking a fun and easy way to spend quality family time with their kids. These new-generation home video projectors are what we've worked hard toward bringing the simplest home cinema solutions into the homes of young families," he adds.

GET YOUR TECH FIX
ON MOBILE

PC.com is also available for the mobile medium, coming in bite-sized MMS news twice a week. We cover the latest tech news, hottest gadgets, product reviews and more. It is currently available for Maxis, Celcom and Digi users.

Exclusive Service

Huawei opens first smartphone clinic in KL

by victor yap

This new point of engagement will not only provide quality after-sales service to Huawei customers, but also act as a direct two-way communication channel between customers and the brand.

According to Mohamed Fawzi Ishak, Director, Service Channel Management, Huawei Technologies Malaysia (Huawei), the long term goal is to open up new ways for the company to listen in on customer feedback and engage requirements that will enable the brand to deliver on the objective of partnering customers through the full product lifecycle.

Besides the opening of the Exclusive Service Centre, Huawei will also be increasing the number of Authorised Collection Points from the current 17 to 100 before the end of 2015. This increase in Authorised Collection Points will also provide more capacity to address growing demands and an increasing customer base. Part of this expansion will also include the implementation of a door-to-door pick-up and delivery service for customers who need prompt response

from Huawei. This is an attempt to boost customer satisfaction even further.

"The opening of our first Exclusive Service Centre is just the beginning as Huawei plans to open similar stores opening in others parts of Malaysia as well. This is to ensure that our brand is easy-to-reach for customers and show that we are ready to engage user issues and problems at a moment's notice," says Mohamed Fawzi. ▣

H uawei Malaysia has listened to its users and fans as it opened its official smartphone service centre. Located on the first floor of Plaza Berjaya, it sits on the renowned spot where the Nokia Malaysia service centre used to reside.

Called the Huawei Exclusive Service Centre, this strategically located operations is a testament of Huawei's commitment to its existing customers.
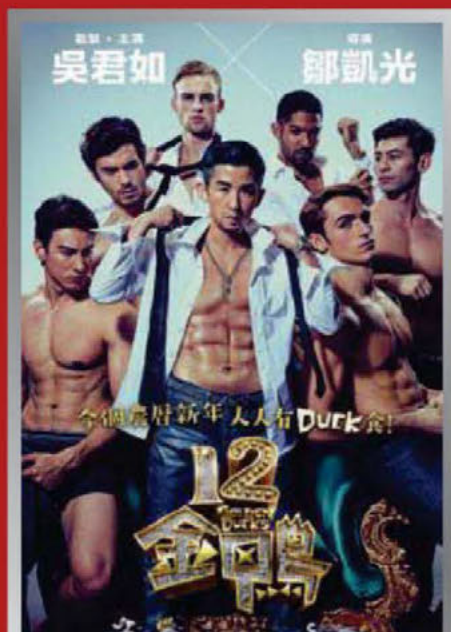
The Great Wall of Xiaomi

by sia zhen ning

Lei Jun, Founder, CEO and Chairman of Xiaomi Inc, showing off the new Xiaomi Mi Note Pro.

Xiaomi announces a slew of products for 2015

Seeing that the Year of the Goat is right around the corner, Xiaomi has decided to announce a slew of products, before everybody gets too caught up with the necessary preparations for the upcoming Chinese New Year festivities.

At its mega-launch in Beijing, Xiaomi has revealed the Xiaomi Mi Note Pro and Mi Note. Tablet-like sizes aside, Xiaomi has also shared of its plans to diversify its product offerings and how it wants to move into new spaces within the multimedia industry.

Xiaomi's main attraction, of course, had been the introduction of the Mi Note and Mi Note Pro. The former sports a 5.7in display that is Full HD capable and is powered with a Snapdragon 801 and 3GB RAM. The latter, meanwhile, is a souped-up version of the Mi Note that rocks a Snapdragon 810 64-bit processor, 4GB RAM, 64GB internal storage, and offers support for LTE Cat 9. The 5.7in display

on the Mi Note Pro is also superior to the Mi Note as it sports a 2K display (2560 x 1440, 515 ppi). Both the Mi Note and the Mi Note Pro will retail for ¥2,299(16GB) and ¥2,799 (64GB) respectively (all prices are in Chinese Yuan).

Apart from the new smart mobile devices, Xiaomi also introduced the Mi Box Mini - a miniaturised version of the Xiaomi Mi Box. Sporting a Quad-Core processor, 1GB RAM, and 4GB storage, this wall adapter-sized set-top box is capable of up to 1080p output. The Mi Box Mini will be priced at ¥199.

Finally, Xiaomi has officially unveiled the Mi Headphones. It features a semi-open design 50mm large beryllium diaphragm speakers with super low 32-ohm impedence, and interchangeable over-ear and on-ear covers. The Mi Headphones is best described by Hugo Barra, Vice President of Xiaomi, to be "the perfect complement to Mi Note and Mi Note Pro." PC

Post Flood Reconstruction

MDeC brings the best in technology to flood affected area

2014 did not end with on a high note in Malaysia, as many Malaysians on the East Coast had been displaced thanks to the flood that went on in December. To assist in the post flood rebuilding efforts, the Multimedia Development Corporation (mDeC), the Ministry of Communication and Multimedia, and private entities from MSC Malaysia, Digital Malaysia, content providers, Non-Governmental Organisations, and various affiliated ministries and agencies have come together to launch the '#TogetherWithU' community campaign. The goal: to bring hope to all flood victims.

The core of the campaign is the e-Bantuan Banjir (eBB) platform - an integrated mobile-enabled system that incorporates Open Data and Social Media that overlays on Internet of Things (IoT) and Big Data Analytics (BDA), as well as crowdsourced funding and volunteer platforms for individuals and corporations to donate resources.

Under the eBB initiative, MDeC will leverage on cutting-edge technology from the MSC Malaysia community and technology providers to provide high-value solutions to assist in the flood-recovery process. This includes an integration of data-points from various private and public sector sources, including a real-time drone images and social media feeds. All data used will provide detailed imaging to identify terrain situations that are stitched together via BDA.

The eBB platform is set to galvanise community support via the eSukarelawan website and mobile apps as it is built to capture and match volunteers from the MSC Malaysia and Digital Malaysia communities to the respective NGOs for post-flood rebuilding tasks. What this platform does is allow volunteers to communicate on the ground to a central online community tagboard. To tie all of these together, the creative content community have stepped forward to provide creative content and animation to

Yasmin: It is very heartening to see so many members of the community coming together - whether it is via donations, providing technology to enable predictive analysis, and mitigation of future flood issues, or volunteering to help with the post-flood relief efforts.

create awareness and hope for the flood victims, especially children.

"Coming from a family that also went through the floods years ago, I can truly empathise with the challenges and emotions that the affected are experiencing. It is very heartening to see so many members of the community coming together - whether it is via donations, providing technology to enable predictive analysis, and mitigation of future flood issues, or volunteering to help with the post-flood relief efforts. This epitomizes the spirit of unity and togetherness to always look out for and help our fellow Malaysians in need," says Dato' Yasmin Mahmood, Chief Executive Officer, MDeC.

(From left) Datuk Seri Ahmad Shabery Cheek, Minister of Communications and Multimedia and Datuk Sri Dr Sharifah Zarah Syed Ahmad, Secretary General of Communications and Multimedia Ministry being briefed by Yasmin of the hardware and services used as part of the '#TogetherWithU' campaign.

Damian Tay, Senior Director APAC Product Management of BlackBerry shares some of the special features of the new BlackBerry Classic at the media launch.

(Second from left) Zalman Aefendy and Damian Tay, Senior Director APAC Product Management of BlackBerry, unveiling the new BlackBerry Classic - now available exclusively with FIRST by Celcom.

Zalman Aefendy: Our continued partnership with BlackBerry reinforces our commitment to provide the finest mobile experience as we simultaneously intensify the growth of our diverse range of smartphone choices.

Classically Blue

Celcom partners up with BlackBerry for Classic release

by sia zhen ning

BlackBerry fans who are eagerly awaiting the release of the BlackBerry Classic need wait no longer as Celcom has partnered with BlackBerry to bring the BlackBerry Classic to Malaysia.

The new BlackBerry Classic runs on BlackBerry Enterprise Solutions (BES12), a cross-platform Enterprise Mobility Management (EMM) solution that enables the ease of managing enterprise mobility efficiently and safely. It enables users to manage all devices (iOS, Android, Windows Phone 8, and BlackBerry) from a single unified console. Other impressive distinctive features include advanced protection for content and in-transit across multiple platforms, value-added services (VAS), BBM Meetings and BBM Protected software - all of which boost optimum communication and collaboration between users as well as sharing confidentiality.

Celcom will be sweetening the deal for those getting a BlackBerry Classic by offering FIRST plans to BlackBerry Classic customers. In fact, Celcom customers can opt for the latest FIRST plans with the new Max Up All and Max Up plans. Max Up All offers value for money. For just as low as RM50, customers can enjoy 250 SMS, 1GB Internet and 1GB WI-FI surfing, and 250 minutes of talk time. With Max Up, customers are afforded greater boost to Internet surfing as they will be able to get 1GB Internet surfing (RM15) and 5GB (RM50). Enterprise customers can choose from Celcom FIRST plans and solutions.

"Our continued partnership with BlackBerry reinforces our commitment to provide the finest mobile experience as we simultaneously intensify the growth of our diverse range of smartphone choices. We give our customers the flexibility to select innovative FIRST plans to suit their evolving digital lifestyles. They will be pampered for choice with distinctive, attractive, and diverse voice and data packages that carry distinct features and enable superior performance at super-fast speeds on Celcom's Fastest Territory network," says Zalman Aefendy Zainal Abidin, Chief Marketing Officer of Celcom Axiata Berhad. ▣

GRAMAS GIVEAWAY

GRAMAS is set to rock this year's Valentine as it wants to give away two iPhone 6 Plus cases. Yes, it's a 'For Him' and 'For Her' deal this time round and you (plus your significant other) can enjoy the exquisite design and high protective performance of these superb cases from Japan.

All you need to do is answer the following questions below:

1. Where does GRAMAS come from?

_____

2. What sort of Apple device does GRAMAS provide cases for in Malaysia?
   (Hint: only two Apple smartphone types that has 6 in its name)

_____

3. With GRAMAS, I can... (20 words or less)

_____

_____

Name: _____   IC Number: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____   Contact Number: _____

MAIL YOUR ANSWERS BY 31 MARCH 2015 TO:
GRAMAS/PC.com Contest:
Reach Publishing, 15-3, Block F1, Dataran Prima,
Jalan PJU 1/42, 47301, Petaling Jaya
OR EMAIL US AT: editor.pcdc@reach.com.my.

Rules and Regulations:
Participants may only send in one entry per name* Reach Publishing Sdn Bhd and Ricoh Malaysia employees and their immediate families are not eligible for this contest* Any decision about the winners is final* All prizes must be collected in person or by representatives* Participants must be 18 and above*

Closing Date: 31 March 2015

GADGET

02

06

09

10

FOR HIM

01 THE KUBE

Combining a cooler with a Bluetooth speaker, the Kube is great for those outdoor BBQs as you can store all your cold drinks while being able to blast out music. This all-in-one device comes with a 110-decibel speaker, making it suitable for those occasions where noise is a factor.
US$1,100, kubesound.com

02 ONEWHEEL

The craziest looking skateboard ever made, the OneWheel - just like the name implies - has one huge wheel in the centre of the board as opposed to the traditional two pair of small rollers at each end of the skateboard. This is perfect for the slightly unhinged adrenaline junkie that resides within.
US$1,499, rideonewheel.com

Ø1

Ø2

03 TAO CHAIR

Would you rather watch TV shows than go to the gym, then why not have some rudimentary workout while watching your favourite programs.The Tao Chair is a chair that is designed for users to have a simple workout. It features a LCD screen that estimates the amount of calories you have burned in a single session.
TBC, taochair.com

04 FUHU NABI BIG TAB XL

Ramping up the absurdity level is the Fuhu Nabi Big Tab XL. This monster-size screen is a tablet made to do one thing: be bigger than all the rest. How big is it? Oh, about 65in or so. If size really does matter for the man of your life, then this tablet is a great fit.
TBC, fuhu.com

05 AVEGANT GLYPH

It may look like a pair of headphones at first glance, and you'd be partially correct, but the Avegant Glyph also features a retinal display build into it. This device is basically a multimedia-in-one headset - allowing you to enjoy your movies, games, or whatever else you fancy on the headset. Now there is no need to get a separate pair of headphones.
US$499, avegant.com

06

07

08

06 DEVIALET PHANTOM

If soundbars are too blocky, why not go for the Devialet Phantom. Shaped like a capsule, it is an omnidirectional wireless speaker that looks like it could be a space-age arm-blaster. This thing is, above and beyond, the coolest looking speaker ever made.

US$1,990, devialet.com

07 AMPL SMARTBACKPACK

Eventhough it is called a SmartBackpack, it doesn't mean that this bag is crammed with sensors or is controllable via an app. On the contrary, this backpack is a standard bag that comes with a built-in 5,000mAh battery that allows you to charge your notebook or smartphone without needing to carry around a power bank. Of course, that is assuming that you carry your notebook or smart device in your bag.

US$299, ampl-labs.com

08 THE ESCAPADE PEDAL BOAT

Want to impress ladies with a boat but you don't have the cash needed to get a motorised one? Well, the Escapade Pedal Boat is the more affordable alternative. Like its given name, it is a boat that moves with pedalling power, much like a bicycle. Best part - it looks like a speedboat, so if you pedal it hard enough, you might just be able to create some decently sized waves with it…no, we kid.

US$3,150, nauticraft.com

FOR HER

09

09 MUSE BRAIN HEADBAND

A brain training tool, the Muse Brain Headband detects brain signals and provides you with valuable feedback that you can use to train your brain. Basically, it is a meditation device, allowing you to find inner peace.
US$299, choosemuse.com

10 MISFIT SWAROVSKI SHINE

Why settle for a boring fitness tracker when you can get one that is totally done up with bling. The Misfit Swarovski Shine is such a fitness tracker, blending jewellery and technology into one really shiny package.
US$169.99, store.misfit.com

10

11
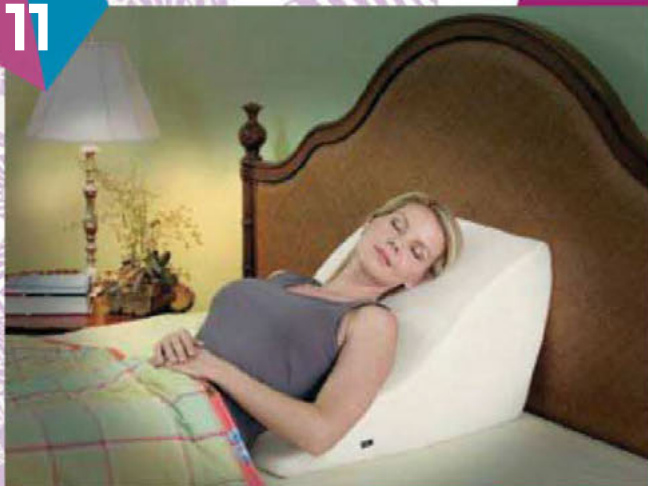
11 MASSAGING BACK WEDGE PILLOW

After a hard day's work, getting a massage may just be a Godsend to many. In case you aren't rich enough to afford one of those massage chairs, why not opt for the Massaging Back Wedge Pillow instead. This pillow comes with integrated vibrating massager that relaxes sore muscles, allowing you to relax right before bedtime.
US$79.95, hammacher.com

12

12 PACIF-I

Even babies are getting their own smart devices these days. Enter the Pacif-I - a smart pacifier that is capable of measuring your baby's temperature, thus allowing you to keep track of your little one's health. This literally makes the digital baby thermometer obsolete.
€30.00, bluemaestro.com

13 RING

The Ring is much larger than your typical wedding band. Even so, it is able to do things a standard wedding band can't as it allows you to programme gestures that can be used to control your phone.
US$130, logbar.jp

13

14 PARROT POT

If gardening is your thing, then the Parrot Pot will come in handy. This pot packs sensors that measure moisture and fertiliser levels, sunlight, and even temperature. It is has a self-watering system, thereby cutting your gardening workload by half.
US$200, parrot.com

15 BLOOM RING

Let's not beat around the bush here, couples are going to do what is natural. Some may even want a little bundle of joy in their lives and the Bloom Ring aims to assist them in that regards. Sporting sensors that gauges the wearer's body temperature, it can estimate the most fertile time of the month.
TBC, bloomring.com

radioshack

You can find these products and more in RadioShack outlets at:
- Mid Valley Megamall
- Berjaya Times Square
- Bangsar Shopping Centre
- Hartamas Shopping Centre
- Pavilion KL
- Sunway Pyramid
- IOI City Mall
- Gardens
  (shop-in-shop inside Borders)
- The Curve
  (shop-in-shop inside Borders)
- Tropicana City Mall
  (shop-in-shop inside Borders)
- Queens Bay Mall Penang
  (shop-in-shop inside Borders)
- Gurney Plaza Penang

16 RSHK HDMI TO COMPONENT CONVERTER

With this cable, you can add flexibility to your viewing experience by converting a digital HDMI video source to an analogue format that HD component video television can work with. The converter requires no external power source and features HDMI input and RCA output for audio and video transfer.

17 AUVIO LIMITED EDITION WOOD HEADPHONES WITH MIC

Elevate your sonic perspective with these AUVIO Limited Edition Wood Headphones as its 40mm drivers deliver powerful bass and realistic sound detailing. For its chassis, premium wood and metal come together to create a classic yet contemporary design. Bonus: when connected to your smartphone, the in-line mic lets you receive calls with the push of a button.

18

18 RADIOSHACK ELECTRONICS LEARNING LAB KIT

Build your own electronic circuits with this Electronics Learning Lab. Featuring over 200 projects that teach you about transistors, diodes, capacitors, oscillators, electronic circuits, and schematic symbols, it is the best starter kit everyone should own. It even has LED, an LED display, and analogue panel meter - offering more visual options when building projects.
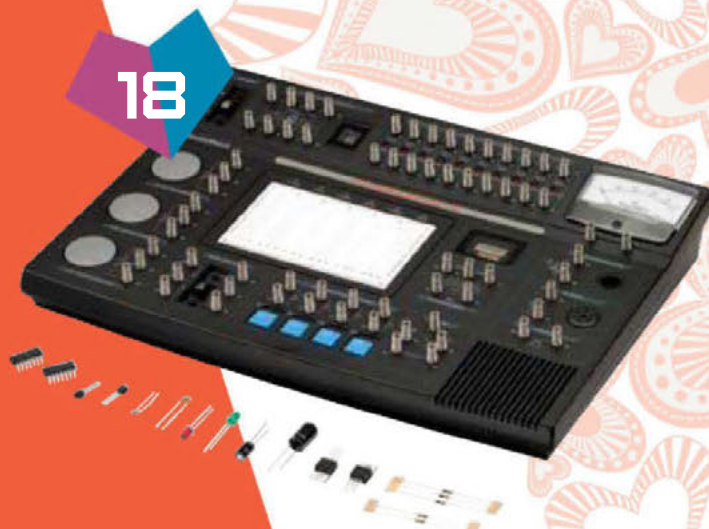
19 RADIOSHACK 10400MAH WATER RESISTANT POWERBANK

19

Enjoy up to 34 hours of talk time, regardless of the weather conditions, with this RadioShack Water-Resistant Portable Power Bank. Time to hit the pool and not worry about sudden rain showers.

20 RADIOSHACK 2.4GHZ RC SURVEYOR DRONE

Want to see the world from way up high? Now you with the RadioShack 2.4GHz RC Surveyor Drone. With its 6-axis flight control system, it is easy to control and manoeuvre around the friendly skies. Once you've mastered flight, the next step is to use the drone's built-in camera to record video and still photos. Aerial photography at its most convenient.

20

REVIEWS BY

matthew yap,
sia zhen ning,
victor yap,
din,
daryl tan,
boris, lord of the acorns,
magnus
edward mass

76
Lenovo
Vibe Z2 Pro

EXCELLENCE:
Minimum score
9.5
Each month, only one device shall receive this award. It's the best of the best, the one and only, and the chosen one all wrapped into a neat package.

CHOICE AWARD:
Minimum score
8.5
This is only for devices that are outstanding in performance, features, and design.

RECOMMENDED:
Minimum score
7.5
Given to gear that rise above the average but yet still deserve recognition.

THE HOWS AND WHYS: METHOD TO THE MADNESS

Dozens of the latest (and quite possibly greatest) gadgets, devices and stolen alien technology arrive at our front door every month. We make it our mission to give you the most balanced opinion on just about every last one of them. It's only fair to both you - our dear esteemed readers, as well as the manufacturers who send us these awesome wonders. To ensure we mean business, we established a strict methodology to determine the final scores for each product category. Benchmarking software, from both FutureMark and PassMark, are our weapon of choice for putting computers to the test, while Quadrant Standard Edition is used to provide an objective score for mobile devices. For everything else, we hand it to our writers to determine the best qualities of whatever it is that fall into our hands.

72
Razer Leviathan

81
Sony SmartBand Talk SWR30

90
ASUS ROG GTX 980 Matrix Platinum

V	P	F	D	U

VALUE
Expensive does not always mean good.

PERFORMANCE
A measure of how well the product stands up to our testing.

FEATURES
The best gimmicks and flashy parts get the top score

DESIGN
Aesthetics are important. The nicer it looks, the more points it gets.

USABILITY
In the end, we just want our gadgets to work. So those that are best for day-to-day tasks are valued higher.

Compact Audio Wonder

Razer Leviathan

by victor yap

When it comes to brand association, Razer is truly known for its gaming peripherals and new ventures into the multimedia space. However, one particular system caught the attention of a different kind as the sleek brand moves into the audiophile space. First, there was the Adaro line for audiophile headset enthusiasts and now Razer moves deeper into the sound scape with its newly launched Razer Leviathan Soundbar.

BEING DIRECT

What got the soundbar space to thrive over the last 12 months is mostly due to the efforts of the audio/visual marketplace introducing new never-seen-before concepts. This caused interest for these integrated audio platforms to skyrocket as consumers keep a keen eye out for products that allow them to continue the ever-popular seamless integration their smart devices are propagating. Razer jumped at the chance as it moves to introduce its own take on the increasingly popular audio platform. Of course, it's not just for movie/music enthusiasts as this is Razer, after all.

TINY HEAVYWEIGHT

Ever wondered what a small box that is somewhat heavy would look/feel like? Well, wonder no more as the Razer Leviathan arrived at the doorstep of PC.com Tested Labs as a well-meaning courier package that looked no bigger than a mini-ATX case. Upon lifting it through the threshold of the Labs did I regretfully learnt, first-hand, how hefty it truly is. Note: please be careful when lifting as it is - kilo to kilo - as heavy as a fully-loaded ATX tower.

TWO-PART

Obviously, the awesome products in the package would be loaded to bear - judging by the amount of force required to lift it onto the workbench. Opening up the brown box revealed another box, black all around with light brown highlights, within. Opening the box-inside-the-box immediately had me facing the soundbar half of the Razer Leviathan. This is the lighter aspect of the sound system. Packed below is the real reason why the entire package is not feather-like: the seemingly packed-to-the-max subwoofer. All it took to get things going is to plug in the devices together via proprietary sub-woofer cable, powering it up, and jacking-in devices that provide the music/sound sources.

ALL IN BLACK

As per Razer's modus operandi, the soundbar and its accompanying bass-delivery system is decked out in black with only the brand logo done up in chrome. It's very much like the Adaro range in terms of looks. The black tone used fully complements the industrial design that Razer is going for with this soundbar as the overall industrial look, streamlined shape, and use of a metal-type grill and feet trimmings are done up in a contemporarily minimalistic design.

EASY SETUP

I'm sure many can relate as to how messy installing a sound system can get, as it's an adventure of untangled cables, charting spaces for speakers, and trawling behind the TV for connectivity. Not so with the Razer Leviathan as it only requires one cable to be jacked into the integrated amp or TV, another for subwoofer connectivity, one for the power, and some quick wire work to get it all into place. Then it's only a matter of turning it on along with the TV and pairing it with the smart devices that are on hand via NFC.

WIRELESS PLAY

Keeping in line with the seamless connectivity trend, Razer also included the full works for Bluetooth connectivity

to ensure the Leviathan has proper wireless streaming capabilities. Besides the latest Bluetooth v4.0, aptX technology and advanced NFC systems are also incorporated to drive home the point of being a highly capable soundbar.

DISTINGUISHED SOUND

Now let's move into the most important part of this review: performance. Looks, features, and branding can only take one so far; hence why trying it out is the most essential part of a review. Part of the content selected include varying ranges of music and songs in the classical, pop, R&B, K-Pop, and Anisong genres; 5.1 enabled Full HD movies, which includes Dolby Surround Sound offerings; videogames that produce distinctive sound effects and realistic audio sequences, and cutscenes that play with central vocals and surround sound-like ambient noises. I must say that each track, scene, mode, and nuance used played out beautifully on the Razer Leviathan. The

drivers and tweeters play up the mid- and high-range/notes easily as it adds some level of clarity to voices, gunfire, and musical chords. This pairs very nicely with the awesomely low thrum and thumps of the bass that the downward firing subwoofer produces.

SURROUND STAGE

So it the Razer Leviathen has proven itself as a proper audio powerhouse when it comes to straightforward sources. How about the digital sound processing and virtual surround performance? Personally, it does no wrong when it comes to creating a proper soundstage for musicals and action movies. Of course, coming from me - someone who is picky with 5.1/7.1 surround systems, this is a really good attempt at emulating an aural landscape that usually requires the physical presence of five/seven speakers.

SOUNDBAR SPECS
Total Power Output
30W (15W x 2RMS)
Full Range Drivers 2 x 2.5in
Tweeter Drivers 2 x 0.74in
Impedance 8Ω
Frequency Response Rate
180Hz - 20KHz
Approximate Weight 2Kg

SUBWOOFER SPECS
Type Passive
Total Power Output 30W RMS
Full Range Drivers 5.25in
Impedance 8Ω
Frequency Response Rate
20Hz - 180Hz
Approximate Weight 2.35Kg

CONNECTION METHODS
Console/Desktop Gaming
3.5mm Audio Jack or Optical Connection
Movies 3.5mm Audio Jack or Optical Connection
Mobile 3.5mm Audio Jack or Bluetooth/NFC

VERDICT

The perfect example of a great soundbar. Leave it to Razer to show how its done.

V P F D U

A Visceral Era

AMD FX 8-Core Black Edition FX-8320E   by din

AMD is well known for years for providing PC enthusiast with high performance processors that gives users value for money. This means you don't have to break the bank to build a performance PC that is suited for extreme gaming. Last year, AMD introduced an updated version of its popular line of FX processors. Based on the Vishera/Piledriver line, these affordable performance CPUs had been given a makeover with the most telling being the bump down on the Wattage as the new empowered brains now run at 95W compared to the 125W of old. AMD has sent over its FX8320E, which can be considered the entry model for the FX line of processors, for full gauntlet run.

E FOR ENERGY

So what is the FX8320E? Well as stated before, it's a makeover from the previous AMD FX processors, with the 'E' at the back representing the "(Energy) Efficient" line. The FX8320E that I have in my hands now is basically a lower-powered version of the previous FX8320 processor that AMD released before. The only differences are the TDP - 95W for the E version compared to 125W for the original FX8320, and the slight speed decrease, 3200Mhz compared to 3500Mhz. Note that while the base speed is decreased, the boost speed for both the processors are still rated at 4Ghz, meaning you'll still get the same high-end performance as the non "E" version of the FX8320E. Since this is also a Black Edition processor, the multipliers are also unlocked for those seeking a CPU that can be overclocked.

NOTHING TO SEE HERE

What surprised me by a fair bit is this CPU having no intergraded graphics (IGP) to work with. Honestly, I am too used to processors that come with its own IGP. So much so that the first time I tried to test the processor, I've spent 10 minutes trying to find a graphics output on the motherboard. Of course, the logic is simple with this AMD entry. In your hands is a performance processor and certainly you won't want to use a processor of this quality with just the IGP? Even so, it had been a shocker - especially as the other processors from the blue side at this price range still includes an on-board IGP.

COOL STORY BRO

So does the 95W TDP make a difference? A lot apparently. The first time I boot-up the motherboard and processor, I had been greeted with a 16°C temperature read-out. While I had used a third-party cooler, I honestly did not expect to see a low heat reading. I even presumed the CPU would be heating up more during the
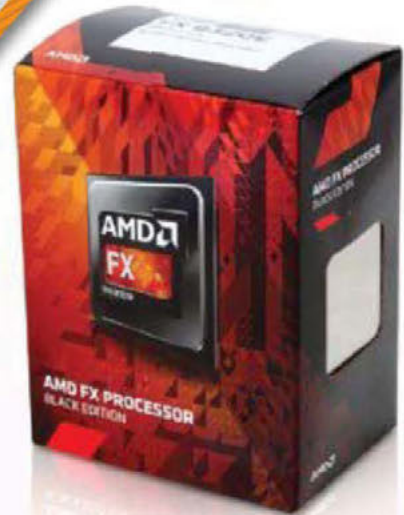
stress test, but lo behold - it still chugged along nicely at temperatures ranging in between the lows and highs 20°C. Even when the boost clock has reached 4GHz in PC Mark 8! As long time readers would know, low heat output would mean better overclocking potential.

NOT A POTATO (CHIP)

The 32nm AMD FX8320E uses an AM3+ socket, so should you already own an AMD motherboard with an AM3+ socket. To get this processor to work properly, all you need is a BIOS update. Indeed, the real reason that AMD introduced this CPU is only because there is a fair number of old AM3+ motherboards in the marketspace that only supports up to 95W. This means users that had been looking into upgrading to a new FX processor had to upgrade their mainboard as well. With the introduction of the E-line FX CPUs, which includes the AMD FX8320E, users do not need to invest in new motherboards. This will totally keep the cost down. Kudos to AMD for thinking of this.

DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION 3

The AMD FX8320E has a built in memory support for dual channel DDR3 RAM - up to 1866Mhz. there is no support for the new DDR4 memory simply because this CPU is targeted for both the 900+ and the 800+ series chipset (BIOS update required). Thus, this move is a logical choice. The 32nm technology might seem to be dated as well but AMD has proven

that there is still many tricks that an old dog could learn.

POWERED PERFORMANCE

I paired the AMD FX8320E with the latest MSI Gaming 970 motherboard, and the garnered performance does not disappoint. Using Futuremark's PC Mark 8 for my benchmarking needs, I put the AMD FX8320E through its paces. Just for fun, I meddled a little with the motherboard as I tried my level best to do a manual overclock. The results are, well, explosively surprising. From the 3.2Ghz base speed, I managed to bump up the CPU all the way up to 4.5Ghz! In fact, I didn't have to do many adjustments as all I did had been to boost the Core voltage to 1.5V. The tweaked system remained stable even when I had a rather long DotA 2 session. Not surprisingly, the temperature barely climbed.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The AMD FX8320E is honestly a surprising entry - a pleasant one that is. For the price that you can buy this processor for, you're getting a high performer that has a LOT of potential. Also you're getting eight Cores, something that would be considered ludicrous a few years ago for a processor at this price range. If you are on the lookout for an affordable system that mainly runs multithreading software and high-end gaming, then the FX8320E is the one for you. 🄿🄲

SPECS
Socket AM3+
Base Speed
3200Mhz (4Ghz Boost)
Wattage 95w
L2 Cache 1024Kb
Build 32nm
Microarchitecture Piledriver
Platform Volan
Processor Core Vishera
Data Width 64 bit
The No of Cores 8
The No of Threads 8
Integrated Graphics None

Futuremark PC Mark 8 Results
Home 3206
Creative 2806
Work 3122

VERDICT

Affordable, green, and high performance. AMD has done it yet again!

V P F D U

Amazing Vibes

Lenovo Vibe Z2 Pro   by matthew yap

RM2,299

Yo, check out this phone from Lenovo! Sorry, that came out of nowhere. But really, the team likes the stuff Lenovo sends us most of the time. In November last year, I attended the launch of the Vibe X2 in KL and yet the one I had really been interested in is the Vibe Z2 Pro. Well, here it is!

DEVICE OF STEEL

How to describe the Vibe Z2 Pro? 'Sleek' comes to mind. Housed in a smooth brushed aluminium unibody, the chilled touch of this smartphone feels great in my hands though it may feel a tad too big for smaller ones. The titanium coloured unit I had for review looks amazing too and shows that when it comes to design, Lenovo nailed it with this one. If there's one thing that detracts from it, I'd say the mini-screws over the panel - where the 16MP rear-facing camera is enclosed in - are just a tad unsightly. However, I'm sure there are people who would like the mechanical appearance.

WINNING DISPLAY

Another thing that makes this smartphone awesome is the lovely 2K display. With 6in of real estate that works up to about 490ppi, images come up great with colour and contrast looking decent. Having that many pixels already ensures visuals will be really sharp. While most of us might not be able to tell the difference between a 1080p screen and this - there's no denying the advantages it has to offer. Lenovo has also included the option to change the colour balance of the panel, something you don't

usually find on smart devices. With it, you could put it on pre-sets or custom tweak the saturation, tone, and contrast. Thanks to the display and the awesome sound performance, the Vibe Z2 Pro is great for games, video streaming, and general media playback.

OUTSTANDING SHOOTER

Full disclosure: it really does stick out but let's ignore the semantics this time. Placed on the backpanel with a red accent, which looks really good by the way, and the two-tone flash, the Vibe Z2 Pro 16MP rear camera is a true high achiever. Further enhancing its performance is the Optical Image Stabilisation system and advanced autofocusing functions that are encased within the sensor. It's on auto (Smart Camera) mode by default and can be switched to professional operation for manual adjustments to controls like exposure, ISO, and even focus length. Quality of shots are great and I love how the results of the HDR function this camera offers.

WARM UNDER THE COLLAR

Thrumming within the Vibe Z2 Pro is a Qualcomm Snapdragon 801 chip. I couldn't help but wonder if the Snapdragon 805, the one Qualcomm boasts as its 4K Ultra HD processor, would have been a better choice. However, the 801 generates an uncomfortable amount of heat. Even if it is slightly alleviated after an over-the-air update, the device still feels warm to the touch when under load. Fortunately, it's able to more or less tackle anything that comes its way. With 3GB of RAM, multitasking is a non-issue. However, since the 805's only real advantage is the Adreno 420 GPU for DirectX 11 games, the idea of using it for regular task due its better platform is highly debatable.

CONTENT CONNECTIVITY

Data speeds can be fast on this device, provided you have LTE coverage or happen to be linked onto a dual-band router. It even has DLNA, so you can stream media from compatible storage devices directly or even push HD streams

onto DLNA-enabled TVs. Lastly, you get Wireless Display, AKA Miracast, as well. Of course, you'd need to get a dongle for that separately.

UI SWAPPING

It doesn't take much to get used to the Lenovo Vibe user interface (UI), though I must say that I'm not fond of the icons. Take the YouTube and Google Chrome icons as examples - they look as if they had been squeezed to fit. Thankfully, the 'Theme Center' lets you change that and the lockscreen visuals as well. Unfortunately, the given selection is very limited. What's interesting is that you have a choice of switching over to stock android UI by using Developer Mode. If you prefer having the app drawer and not have to use folders, then this is the alternative Lenovo has prepared.

APP SECURITY

The Vibe Z2 Pro also lets you keep certain apps private under the Secure Zone. With this, you could technically run two separate Whatsapps using two zones; I imagine this would be useful for people who have two SIMs and want to keep the one for work secured.

SUFFICIENT POWER

Since the device has to output at a higher resolution, battery life is going to be affected. Therefore, Lenovo decided to cram a large 4000mAh battery into the Vibe Z2 Pro. Enhancing that is the Power Manager app – a feature that provides a good number of customisations that improve energy management so as to lengthen the battery life. Typically, it can last a day and still have 10-20% of power when I get off work. Of course, all I did had been browsing the Internet, using Whatsapp, loading some entertainment content, and checking out emails. Heavy users will find that they might have to pull out the device chargers sooner than expected. PC

SPECS
Dimensions
156 x 81.3 x 7.7 mm
Weight 179 g
Chipset Snapdragon 801
CPU Quad-core 2.5 GHz Krait 400
Graphics Adreno 330
Memory 3GB RAM
Display IPS LCD, 6in,
1440 x 2560 pixels
Camera 16 MP rear-facing
(OIS, autofocus, and dual-LED flash), 5MP front-facing
Storage 32 GB
Operating System
Android 4.4 Kitkat, Color OS 2.0
Battery 4000 mAh

BENCHMARK
3DMark Ice Storm Unlimited
16832
Antutu 43040
Basemark X High Quality
12544
Anomaly 2 High Quality
568285
GFXBench Manhattan
426.4 (6.9 fps)
GFXBench Manhattan 1080p
705 (11 fps)
GFXBench T-Rex 1095 (20 fps)
GFXBench T-Rex 1080p
Offscreen 1523 (27 fps)

VERDICT
Design or performance, it excels in all.

V P F D U

Ad Absurdum

MSI GT80 Titan SLI 2QE · by sia zhen ning

Let's be honest, no one cares about the preamble for this review. What you really want to know is if the MSI GT80 Titan (GT80 Titan) is the best thing that's ever happened to gaming notebooks. So let's get right into it - here's the GT80 Titan in all its monstrous glory.

DO YOU EVEN LIFT?

First things first, the GT80 Titan is obscenely huge. Weighing in at 4.5kg and being just as thick as eight tablets stacked on top of each other, this notebook is a true blue desktop replacement. To complement its size, the power-brick itself weighs a full kilo and is bigger than a 300 page paperback novel. Guess that is why big things come in pairs. I had to bring this thing into office on two separate occasions and the trip from the office to the basement parking lot (and vice versa) is ridiculously tiring.

POWER OVERWHELMING

So why is the GT80 Titan so large? It is mostly due to the components located used within. Everyone who has ever read about the monstrous MSI gaming beast knows a mechanical keyboard had been thrown in - but what about the specifications? Well, based on the unit sitting in the office, I can safely say that it is as excessive as the GT80 Titan's size. Featuring an Intel i7 4720HQ chip, the Haswell-based chip that goes by the codename Sharkbay, 16GB RAM, and two NVIDIA GeForce GTX 980M in SLi mode, it is possibly the most powerful gaming notebook in like…forever. This setup pretty much ensures that you're going to be able to max out any game that will be released within the next two years or so.

IS THAT ALL YOU'VE GOT?

Of course, with hardware that powerful, it would be a shame not to push the GT80 Titan to its limits. As such, I've pulled out every game I have access to and then some. The results? None of them managed to challenge this titanic gaming platform. I've thrown Wolfenstein: The New Order, Metro Last Light, Elite Dangerous, Planetside 2, and, of all things unholy, I've loaded up Evolve Beta into the mix as well. Expectedly, all the results turned out the same as they've all run smoother than a baby's backside. What does make the GT80 Titan sweat, oddly enough, is the 3DMark Fire Strike Ultra benchmark test - coincidentally a 4K type video test. Suffice to say, the only way that you can break the machine right now is if you intend to do some serious 4K gaming on it.

RUNNING SILENT

With all the horsepower located beneath the hood, it is only natural that the fan would be louder than most…right? Well surprisingly not as the default fans used run on near silent operation. Using the primary cooling only still kept the temperature of this machine running at around 80° Celsius. This is during a gaming load, mind you. If that is way too hot for comfort, there is a button located just beside the power button that toggles the secondary fan. When engage, these are in stark contrast to the primary as they punch out extra cooling performance at the price of being are very loud. What it lacks in silence, it more than makes up for it in cooling as the GT80 Titan is able to maintain a relatively cool 55° Celsius when the secondary cooling turbines fired up.

ELECTRICITY DRAIN

I hope you guys aren't expecting the GT80 Titan to have a long lasting battery when gaming - because it really doesn't. The notebook contains a toggle for the GPU just like the fan does. By default, it utilises the integrated Intel Graphics platform. Activating the GPU allows the

GT80 Titan to tap the GTX 980M SLi but it does require a restart before you can fully engage it. As for the integrated graphics solution, when used, the notebook can last up to four hours. Keep in mind that there is no gaming involved. With SLi on, the battery lasts around two hours at most. If you're gaming with it, the system won't even last for an hour. Simply put - no power brick means no gaming. That's a slight bummer right there.

MAX OUT THE CREDIT CARD

The biggest problem with the GT80 Titan isn't the battery life, nor is it the weight. You guessed it, the real issue is the asking price. At RM13,999, this king of gaming notebooks is going to be out of range for around 98% of our readers. Even for those that can afford it, the amount of money you are going to spend to get this notebook is enough to build yourself a desktop with a Quad SLi solution. So unless you have managed to find a golden-egg laying goose or have hit the jackpot at the lottery, you're probably not going to be able to afford this. But if you somehow manage to stumble onto a huge stockpile of money, should you get it? Personally, if money is a non-issue, then I would go out and get it. Why? Only for the very reason that the GT80 Titan is such a ridiculous notebook to own that it gives me a great reason to smile like a maniac. If you had been able to even use the GT80 Titan, then you'd understand. Needless to say, it is one of the most powerful notebooks I have, and will ever, put my grubby hands on. It's just too bad that only a handful of people would be able to own it.

SPECS
Weight 4.5kg (w/battery)
Dimensions (W x H x D)
45.6 x 33 x 4.9cm
CPU Intel i7 4720HQ
Chipset HM87
Memory 16GB DDR3
Graphics Dual NVIDIA GeForce GTX 980M, 8GB GDDR5 SLi
Display 18.4in WLED FHD (1920 x 1080) Anti-Glare Display
Audio 4+1 Speaker System, 2 speakers for each channel, supports 7.1 channel SPDIF output
Storage Super RAID 2-384GB SSD (M.2 SATA) + 1TB (SATA) 7200rpm
Operating System
Windows 8.1
Connectivity Killer N1525 Combo (2 x 2 a/c) + Bluetooth 4.0 M.2 type
Ports
1x HDMI (v1.4), 5x USB 3.0, 2x Mini-DisplayPort, 1/1x Mic-in/ Headphone-out

Benchmarks
PCMark 8 Home 3863
PCMark 8 Creative 4440
PCMark 8 Work 3333
3DMark Fire Strike 12261
3DMark Fire Strike Extreme 7358
3DMark Fire Strike Ultra 3927

VERDICT
The most insane desktop replacement in existence.

Slimline Cellular

OPPO R5 — by sia zhen ning

RM1,598

When OPPO first revealed the OPPO R5, it had been widely touted to be 'the thinnest smartphone in the world'. While the R5 is no longer the holder of such a title, it is still one of the thinnest I have worked on. So let's see if the OPPO R5 is everything packed in a slim package or just plain anorexic in general.

RAZOR THIN

Measuring at just 4.9mm, the OPPO R5 is the slimmest smartphone that I've ever held in my hands. Apart from the slim factor, the R5 feels great when I held it. The white shell on the unit has a nice smooth finish that gives it a premium feel. However, the rear camera does jut out from the back of the smartphone. Indeed an inevitable situation when one designs a smartphone to be as thin as possible like what OPPO offers.

HOME IN THE MID-RANGE

Of course a smartphone that is all looks and no muscle is useless, so how does the R5 fair? For a mid-ranger, the R5 performs what is needed of it well. The smartphone is able to handle any day-to-day tasks with minimal fuss while the camera on the R5 is pretty standard as far as smartphone cameras go - 13MP at the back and 5MP for front-side image snapping. The battery life is a bit on the low side though as a full day's use almost depleted the full charge. If you frequently use your smartphone throughout the day, remember to charge it before you sleep.

HOT BLOODED

One drawback when you're designing a thin phone is heat dissipation. Because of the thin form factor of the R5, the heat builds up really quickly on the upper half of the smartphone. After running benchmarks on it, the upper half gets uncomfortably hot. Even simple low stress usage, such as using the Web browser is enough for the R5 to generate enough heat to make it noticeable.

SPECS

Dimension (W x H x D) 148.9 x 74.5 x 4.9mm
Weight 155 g
Processor Qualcomm MSM8939 Snapdragon 615
Graphics Adreno 405
Memory 2GB RAM
Display 5.2in AMOLED capacitive touchscreen
Camera 13MP rear-facing, 5MP front-facing
Storage 16GB internal
Operating System Android OS, v4.4.4 (KitKat)
Battery 2000mAh Li-Po battery

3DMark Ice Storm 9561
3DMark Ice Storm Unlimited 8279
3DMark Ice Storm Extreme 5676

VERDICT

A really hot smartphone - both literally and figuratively.

IT'S HOT

There is no denying that the R5 is an attractive looking smartphone. However, that attractiveness does come with a cost. If you can put up with the low battery life and the heat generated by it, then you should consider this entry from OPPO. 📱

Monochrome Band

by sia zhen ning

Sony SmartBand Talk SWR30

RM579

SCORE

8.0

Smart wearables are gaining traction slowly but surely. Sony Mobile, being rather experienced in designing wearable technology, wants to assert that it hasn't lost its touch in producing such innovations. To prove that notion, it has released the SmartBand Talk SWR30 to compete with the other smartwatches out there.

NO FRILLS

When it comes to looks, the SWR30 is a rather simple looking smartwatch. You can't pop the display out of the band itself but you can pull the band away from the display, allowing you to swap the bands out if you like.

BLACK AND WHITE

Display-wise, the SWR30 utilises E-Ink tech. If you've ever seen a Pebble smartwatch before, then you will know how the display on this thing looks like. Thanks to the monochrome nature of the display, this also makes the watch consume less energy, making it able to last around two days or so. The display is also very visible under direct sunlight, so you don't have to worry about squinting your eyes just to look at the screen.

WORK AND PLAY

As a smartwatch, the SWR30 has pretty much everything you want out of it. It works in tandem with Sony's own Lifelog app, giving you a basic breakdown of your daily activities. The watch itself contains a mic, allowing you to talk to someone else from the watch directly, and the sound on the other side isn't too shabby either.

NO FRUITS ALLOWED

Do you use Apple devices instead of Android smartphones? Then you'll want to steer clear of this smartwatch as it does not support iOS period. For those of you who use Android devices though, this

device can be slightly pricier than some of the smartwatches available on the market. However, if you don't mind the price-tag, the SWR30 is a pretty lean smartwatch.

SPECS

Weight 24g
Dimension (W x H)
23.5 x 9.5 mm
Connectivity Bluetooth 4.0, NFC
Battery 70mA battery
Display 1.4 inch black and white E-Ink display
Durability Waterproof IP68 rated
Compatibility
Android 4.4 and later

VERDICT

An Android-specific smartwatch that lasts long.

V P F D U

Motorised Snapper

OPPO N3   by matthew yap

OPPO is probably not a new name for many of you as the brand has been doing a lot of marketing to promote its smartphones. Everyone knows of its Find 7 thanks to all the buntings plastered all over Klang Valley last year. The Chinese manufacturer even has a localised website as well as service centres and concept stores opened all over Malaysia. However, the Find 7 isn't the focus of this review here. Instead, the team takes a gander at the OPPO N3 - the successor to the OPPO N1 camera phone. Don't ask us why a number had been skipped.

THIS WAY PLEASE

The OPPO N3 is a surprisingly large device, particularly since its screen is 5.5in. At 192g, it's also one of the heaviest in its class. If all those don't bother you, then that's great because the new OPPO device is a thing of beauty. The smartphone is as elegant as it gets with its white body and metallic frame giving it a proper polished look. Sitting at the bottom of the device is the notification light, AKA the OPPO Skyline notification, while directly on the opposite end is the superstar - the famed rotating camera. Sporting a leather-like design, it has a two-tone flash system. Capping all that is the clickable fingerprint sensor, which works to unlock the device, right below.

TOUGH AS NAILS

The frame of the OPPO N3 is metallic - specifically aluminium, to provide a solid feel while in the hand. Located on the right and left side respectively are the volume rocker and power buttons - both of which are also made of the same alloy. Placements of ports are a bit unusual though as the audio jack is found on the right side of the phone while the microUSB port occupies the spot on the lower left. Oddly, the back does flex slightly when you press on it though it is negligible enough that most won't notice it.

RM2,098

ROTATING LENS WINS

Now let's talk about the main selling point of this device, which makes it unique in a market of Snapdragon 801 flagships - the camera. Able to rotate a maximum of 206°, the OPPO N3 lens is Schneider Kreuznach certified. Being the star of this show means this flagship has a lot of reasons to perform well. While its low-light performance isn't great, this smartphone camera excels outdoors, is great for selfies (16MPs!), and comes with a host of of useful features and user options. Highlights among them include the HDR and Auto Panorama modes. The latter makes the lens rotate automatically as it perfectly stitches the

panorama shot. As for the former, while it seems to be more of a dynamic range adjustment than anything else, the visual tweaks look a little overexposed yet somewhat muted.

WHERE'S MY 4K?

Video capture and the default video player on the N3 aren't great either. Compound the fact of why 4K had been left out. As it is, microSD cards can be hot-loaded onto it for managing the heavy file size requirement of 4K. In terms of recording performance, videos captured in low-light

have noticeable noise in it while details on objects are poor. As for media playback, you can't play certain file formats with the built-in video player. Now you may think that sounds silly but I like having smartphones that double as media players so these factors are important for me. Fortunately, the operating system (OS) itself is capable of playing those files but I had to download another video player from the Google Play Store. Hopefully, future software updates to the OS can improve, and even enhance, the overall quality of the camera.

O-CLICKS!

Looking to selfie with that 16MP sensor and reveal your complexion in close detail? OPPO says you need the O-Click, the Bluetooth remote that comes bundled together with the OPPO N3. It's a bit hard to pry open to insert the battery at first, but once done everything else is easy - from pairing to taking random shots or selfies. That's not all, losing track of the OPPO N3 is close to impossible now as the remote an signal the smartphone to play a tune,

making it easier to locate it. Nifty feature, that one.

FAST POWERS

As expected, the OPPO N3 retains the VOOC mini rapid charger. That's great because the battery life isn't all that fantastic, since it even has a motorised lens to power. Using the 5A rated adapter, OPPO claims that you can charge the device by 75% in just 30 minutes. To prove the notion, I charged it for 35 minutes after the battery level dipped below 10%. Lo behold, the power shot back up to 90%.

SPLASH OF COLOUR

The OPPO ColorOS 2.0 runs the show on the OPPO N3. Like all Chinese-based smart device user interfaces (UI), this one doesn't feature an app drawer; I'm sure many would get bored of sharing this one day. Even so, it's customised extensively and has a theme store if you want a different look. Now all OPPO needs to do is roll out a major update for ColorOS that will hopefully address the niggles experienced during this review.

SPECS
Dimensions 161.2 x 77 x 9.9 mm
Weight 192 g
Chipset Snapdragon 801
CPU Quad-core 2.3GHz Krait 400
Graphics Adreno 330
Memory 2GB RAM
Display
IPS LCD, 5.5in, 1080 x 1920 pixels
Camera 16 MP rotating camera
(autofocus and dual-LED flash)
Storage
32 GB, expandable by microSD
Operating System
Android 4.4 Kitkat, Color OS 2.0
Battery 3000mAh

Benchmark
3DMark Ice Storm Unlimited
17637
Antutu 42325
Basemark X High Quality
10233
Anomaly 2 High Quality
965763
GFXBench Manhattan
622.3 (10 fps)
GFXBench Manhattan
1080p 609.7 (9.8 fps)
GFXBench T-Rex 1310 (23 fps)
GFXBench T-Rex 1080p
Offscreen 1283 (23 fps)

VERDICT
A fantastic camera phone, but needs better software processing.

Test, Test

Razer Seirēn

by victor yap

It's not every day PC.com Tested Labs receives a microphone to review - one that is currently making waves in the recording scene at that. How big a splash has it made? Well, for being known as a gaming peripheral maker to a brand that jumped into the studio recording scene, it is no wonder why most have raised eyebrows. Yes, I'm referring to Razer's uncharted attempts into a new space with its Razer Seirēn.

NEW VENTURE

While Razer does have some experience in the microphone space, it is mostly with the inline mic. With the Razer Seirēn, it's a whole different ballgame as the gaming peripheral maker now has to consider the deeper aspects of microphone performance.

PACKED INSIDES

To show it means business, Razer has made sure to equip the Razer Seirēn with the best gear and intuitive functions that studios would expect to see on a mix of sound recording equipment. This includes the shock mount, pop filter (both accessories not included), and three 14mm custom-tuned condenser caps array.

VARIED MODES

While the physical materials help to improve overall recording performance, with improved noise reduction and hissing reduction, the condenser caps array is the more important aspect as it offers four recording options: Cardoid, Stereo, Omnidirectional, and Bidirectional, the core offerings for the Razer Seirēn. These recording variances allow Razer's first professional mic to stand out among the market entries that are currently available.

OUTSPOKEN PERFORMANCE

Admittedly, I don't work on many recording jobs, if at all. However, I did give the Razer Seirēn a unique run as I used it for in-game chats and interview recordings. I also passed it on to a pair of powerful vocalists for a recording or two. With its intuitive user controls (mode change and mic gain customisation) and master volume output knob, it's an easy call to label it as ultra user-friendly. Its core competencies are awesome as well with general vocal performance pick-up is excellent with near zero noise and hisses. If anything, this is the closest anyone can get to own a studio recording mic. **PC**

SPECS
Microphone
Power Required / Consumption 5V 500mA (USB)
Sample Rate 192kHz
Bit rate 24bit
Capsules
Three 14mm Condenser Capsules
Polar Patterns Cardioid, Stereo, Omnidirectional, Bidirectional
Frequency Response
20Hz - 20kHz
Sensitivity 4.5mV/Pa (1kHz)
Max SPL 120dB (THD: 0.5% 1kHz)

Headphone Amplifier
Impedance > 16ohms
Power Output (RMS) 130mW
THD 0.009%
Frequency Response
15Hz - 22kHz
Signal-to-Noise Ratio 114dB

VERDICT
A microphone like no other. Indeed, Razer has done it again.

V P F D U

A Fresh Start

Microsoft Lumia 535

by matthew yap

RM457

Right after the Nokia Lumia 630 from last month comes the newly renamed Microsoft Lumia 535 dual-SIM edition. But wait, Microsoft? That's right! While it's not really breaking news, it has been confirmed that Microsoft completed the takeover of the Lumia brand in April last year. With the takeover, future Lumia devices now no longer sport the Nokia branding and will come with the Microsoft logo instead. The Lumia 535 is the first of such devices. What we want to know is how this is any different from its Nokia predecessors.

GIVE ME 5!

The Lumia 535 is, specifically, round two and Microsoft's way of improving on the lacklustre Lumia 530. It now sports a larger 5in screen that's pretty decent. It's not fantastic by any means - since you lose detail and colour when the screen is seen from an angle - but the sharpness stays decent throughout.

MOSTLY SIMILAR

Like the Lumia 630 from last month, the Lumia 535 sports a removable back cover that can be swapped out. There is a gap between the cover and the insides, so there will be a bit of flex if you press on it. However, the grip is good and, at this size, it's great for one hand operation.

LOOK WHAT'S BACK

If you've seen the Lumia 630 you know that one of the drawbacks of that smartphone is the lack of a front-facing camera. The 535 brings that back along with the automatic brightness function. In addition, the Lumia 535 will have more than just the usual Windows Mobile staples like Skype, like the new intelligent personal assistant - Microsoft Cortana.

SO WHAT NOW?

Besides the basics, the Lumia 535 is definitely a big improvement from the 530. However, the question remains, would

Microsoft be able to successfully grab more of the smartphone market pie with budget phones. While the verdict is still out, many are hoping to see the upcoming Windows 10 upgrade would include these highly affordable devices as well. That would drive up the selling proposition for Microsoft.

SPECS
Dimensions
140.2 x 72.4 x 8.8 mm
Weight 146 g
Display
540 x 960 pixels, 5-inches IPS LCD
CPU Quad-core 1.2 GHz Cortex-A7
GPU Adreno 302
RAM 1GB
Storage 8 GB, expandable microSD up to 128 GB
Camera 5MP rear facing (autofocus, LED flash); 5MP wide-angle front facing
Operating System Microsoft Windows Phone 8.1
Battery 1905 mAh
Stand-by Up to 336 h
Talk time
Up to 11 h (2G) / Up to 13 h (3G)

Benchmarks
Antutu 11703
Basemark OS II 414
Sunspider 1.0.2 1253ms

VERDICT

A great new start for the Lumia brand under Microsoft.

Audio Bliss

Meizu MX4   by matthew yap

RM1,099
(16GB)

The Chinese manufacturers are expected to continue their onslaught this year and Meizu is one of the new kids on the block in Malaysia. Already, this particular vendor has begun selling the MX4 here and will be bringing in its MX4 Pro sometime this year as well. While Meizu might be a new name for many, for those of us in the ICT news reporting line and a few others who hunt the Internet for their next gadget, it's a brand that these few would have been aware of. In fact, I knew of it since my days in college. The thing is, Meizu had primarily been a manufacturer of MP3 players back then. However, it now has smartphones too and, thus, it's appropriate

the Meizu MX4 has come in for a hands-on this month.

HAVE WE MET?

The MX4's design would look familiar to many, with its curved back reminiscent of the good old third iteration of a Korean flagship while the home button would surely make others think of a particular fruity brand. Regardless of such similarities, this one seems well built. The unit sent over to PC.com Tested Labs is grey in colour and while that's fine, I would have preferred either the gold or silver coloured one as they do have a more premium feel. From the front,

the side-frames are clearly metallic and that's because it's made with a high-tech aircraft-type aluminium alloy. Add the polycarbonate body on and the result is a device that has a solid build yet is priced affordably. Smartphones with a full metal unibody are nice but not many can pay the premium attached to such designs.

POWERED SNAP

Behind the device is the Meizu brand logo, a 20.7MP rear-facing camera, and the two-tone flash that is placed right below. The volume rocker is on the left while the power button and 3.5mm audio jack is on top. While this is a pretty strange

placement for the former, fortunately I didn't find it to be an issue. Lastly, Meizu placed the mic, microUSB port, and speaker at the bottom.

PUZZLING DESIGN

You can't remove the battery and there's no microSD or dual SIM slot on the MX4. This makes me question the decision to make the back removable - won't it have been better to use an eject tray for the SIM? I'm especially put off by the lack of the former though some may argue that getting the larger capacities of the MX4 is enough. To be fair, this is my personal preference so it might not be a big deal for others.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

There are things about the MX4 that I needed to be familiarised with and that is saying a lot for a Chinese manufactured device. For one, there's no capacitive back button, making it very unusual and inconvenient. Meizu makes up for this is by adding an overlay with that button for apps. Thus far, I've yet to encounter an app where it doesn't work, so kudos to them for it.

TOP-CLASS DISPLAY

As for the screen, the one that Meizu MX4 uses is excellent. While some are in love with QHD, I think it's better to stick to 1080p for now. A screen that offers characteristics of the former wouldn't have much to offer and, on Full HD, the MX4 does well enough, outputting images that look crisp and offer excellent viewing angles. It's really bright too so I can read off of it or check the map even when I'm outdoors. One more thing to note is that the unusual aspect ratio means you can't watch YouTube videos in 1080p.

SERENADE ME THIS

Back in 2008, I had been hunting around for a high-end MP3 player that could possibly play any audio format. That had been how I go to know about Meizu, an industry expert in making some of the best portable media players around. With the Meizu MX4, I found the quality of the audio performance of this device to be equally as amazing. It sounds great on speakers but you'll want to have a good set of earphone or headphone if you have plans to not share your passion in music.

MORE ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

The MX4's camera is probably the one thing I wished had performed better somehow. It may boast a 20.7MP sensor with two-tone flash controls that offer better white balancing, though in actual fact the pictures have a lot of noise in them. Up front is only a 2MP camera, so don't expect to capture any hi-res selfies with it. Overall, the MX4's camera really lets what could have been an all-rounded phone. On the flipside, it does pretty well when it comes to videos.

HIGH PERFORMER

Meizu boasts that the MX4 tops the chart for Antutu, all thanks to its Octa-Core MT6595 chipset it uses. Running on two quad-core processors in an ARM big. LITTLE configuration, the CPU is definitely a good one and while the GPU benchmarks don't offer the same high performance, the MX4 can still take almost everything you throw at it. Truly, that's what consumers look for in a smartphone - its real world performance. Hence, there's no reason to suggest Meizu's smartphone here can't perform. The MX4 ticks a lot of checkboxes on the list of things people want these days and if you don't include the mixed photo-taking performance, its asking price makes it a very attractive choice today.ß PC
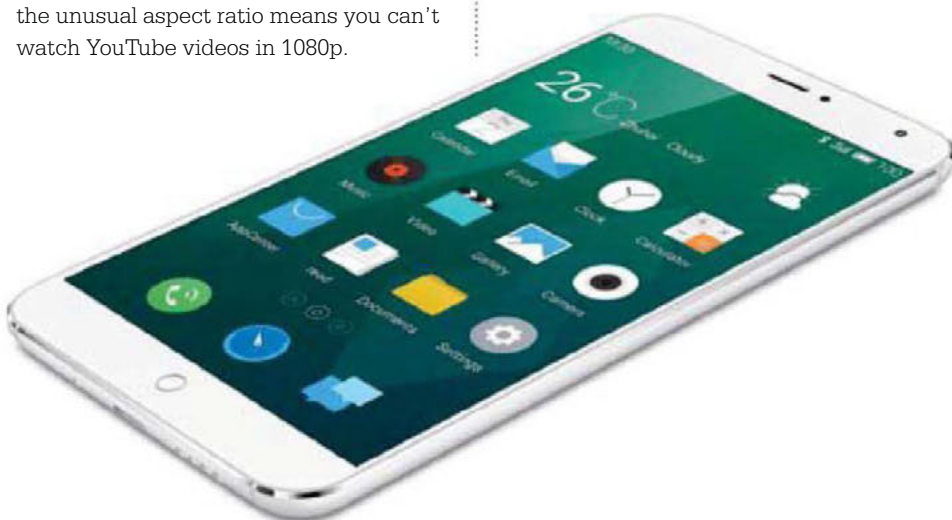
SPECS
Dimensions 144 x 75.2 x 8.9 mm
Weight 147 g
Chipset MediaTek MT6595
Graphics PowerVR G6200 MP4
Memory 2GB RAM
Display
IPS LCD, 5.36in, 1152 x 1920 pixels
Camera 20.7 MP rear-facing (autofocus and dual-LED dual tone flash), 2MP front-facing
Storage 16GB
Operating System
Android 4.4 Kitkat, Flyme OS 4.0
Battery 3100 mAh

Benchmark
3DMark Ice Storm Unlimited
17233
Antutu 50903
Basemark X High Quality 8015
Anomaly 2 High Quality 253196
GFXBench Manhattan
447 (7.2 fps)
GFXBench Manhattan
1080p 471.8 (7.6 fps)
GFXBench T-Rex
1060 (19.0 fps)
GFXBench T-Rex
1080p Offscreen 1097 (20.0 fps)

VERDICT
Superbly value product that gets many things right.

Your AMDmirable Partner

MSI Gaming 970   by din

The socket AM3+ (and its original AM3) has been around for some time and had originally been introduced to cater for the Bulldozer-based CPU. Compared to the LGA changing history of the Blue Camp, AMD meanwhile usually maintains a processor socket design for a long while. This leads to less cost for users since it means that they don't have to change their motherboards when they upgrade to new CPUs. With the introduction of the new 'E' processors in its FX line though, AMD is also pushing its 970 chipset, a new system that will not only the best for a high-end motherboard but also won't break the bank either. AMD had been kind enough to send in MSI variant of the Gaming 970 motherboard to Tested Labs for a killer run.

RED VS BLACK

The MSI Gaming 970 motherboard, as the name implies, is part of the MSI Gaming line of hardware. Hence you can immediately tell that the mainboard is made for gamers. As with every other product in this line, the box comes in black with red highlights. A giant dragon tribal logo emblazons the top. Inside, safely tucked away in a non-static bag is the ATX-sized motherboard. I must say that I really dig the black/red design as it never looks old. The motherboard comes in full black with only the heatsink on the top as well as the MSI dragon logo on the Southbridge is splashed in red. Place it in a black, or even white casing, and it would really blend in. The spacing looks nice and uncluttered, although I had been surprised to see the inclusion of the rather dated PCI slot. Two in fact!

STARTER PACK

To start off your build, MSI has bundled with the motherboard an I/O shield, three SATA 6Gb/s cables, a two-way SLi bridge, MSI Gaming sticker for your casing, manuals, driver DVD, and a door sign. Pretty normal for a budget-priced motherboard and so don't expect some premium stuffs here.

SOME GRAPHICS REQUIRED

Due to the AMD FX series not having any Intergrated Graphic Processor (IGP) in the processor, there are no graphic output for this motherboard. This is why you will need to use a third-party GPU to use this motherboard. To cater for this, the MSI Gaming 970 has included two PCI-e graphic slots - one rated at x16, while the other at x8. These slots support AMD and NVIDIA multi-GPU solutions, namely CrossFire and SLi. I had been caught off-guard at the inclusion of the SL as this is usually never found on a motherboard of this price range. Of course, AMD has worked with NVIDIA to make sure SLi is supported in its 900+ chipset. My only complaint is that the second PCI-e slot is placed at lower echelons of the motherboard as such a dreary location could hinder cable management

if your second graphic card has a rather large cooler.

MIND THE REAR

Since there are no graphic outputs for the motherboard, the rear slots might seem sparse the first time you look at it. Please don't be fooled as there are a lot more going on than you might think. There is a PS/2 legacy connector for those who are still using an old keyboard or mouse, eight USB 2.0 ports that should let you connect all the peripherals that you own, two high-speed USB 3.0 jacks, as well as a high-speed Gigabit Killer E220 slot. Note that the 900+ chipset does not natively support USB 3.0 hence the motherboard uses an add-on chip. During my tests, I learnt that the speed difference of this add-on chip is negligible compared to a natively built in USB 3.0 system so you won't really have any speed issues.

WHAT SMALL FINGERS YOU HAVE

Since this is not a high-end motherboard, MSI has decided to skimp on some features that you usually see on its flagships. Namely you won't get any LED readouts as well as no power/reset button. While we don't really miss them, what we do want is the OC Genie button that MSI usually includes on most of its mainboards. You can access the OC Genie function from inside the BIOS but that means going through some extra navigation. I am also not really happy with the location of the 8-Pin EPS 12V connector as it sits too near the VRM heatsink and may have the problem of latching on the heatsink's

sides. For someone that has a rather large finger, it had been a nightmare trying to unlatch the 8-Pin connector after I finished up and wanted to pack it back.

SOUND AND SPEED

I've always loved MSI's Audio Boost. The Realtek Audio chipset that MSI used is protected and shielded so that there is no electrical interference that can hinder the audio quality. Not only that, the analogue output is gold-plated to ensure better audio quality throughput. Audiophiles as well as gamers rejoice! The FX line of processors support DDR3 RAM, so it's no surprise to see four banks of DDR3 slots on the right side of the motherboard. The latching mechanism has been made better so that you only need to latch the top side of the RAM slot to the memory modules in. For those that love overclocking, the motherboard supports speed up to 2133Mhz in overclocking mode!

OVERCLOCK ON

Overclocking is pretty easy on this motherboard. So much so fact that while fiddling around, I managed to get the AMD FX 8320E to a whopping 4.5Ghz from its stock speed of 3.2Ghz. The overclocking menu in the BIOS page is very extensive and it could overwhelm you at first. So it's better to sit down and make sense of everything you can change (and you can change a LOT of things). If not, there is always the built-in OC Genie function.

THE ENDWORD

This is one very good motherboard. While it might not have every function or extras that you might get with a full blown high-end system, what you get here is mostly enough - especially if you're building a rig on a budget. The BIOS is top

notch and the overclocking performance really blew my mind. Look for nothing else if you are moving onto the new AMD Vishera platform.

SCORE

8.8

SPECS
Dimensions (W x H)
305 x 244mm
CPU Support
AM3+ (FX Buldozer/Vishera)
Chipset AMD 970+SB950
Hyper Transport Bus
HyperTransport 3.0 (Supporting Speeds of up to 4.8GT/s)
Memory DDR3
1066/1333/1600/1866/2133*(*OC)
Dual Channel 32GB max
Slots 2x PCIe 2.0 x16 (1x x16, 1x x8), 2x PCIe 2.0 x1, 2x PCI
Multi Graphic
2-Way Crossfire/SLi
SATA 6x SATA 6Gb/s (Supports RAID 0, 1, 5, and 10)
USB 14x USB 2.0, 4 USB 3.0
Audio Realtek ALC1150, 7.1- Channel HD Audio
LAN Killer E2205 Gigabit LAN
Onboard GPU None
I/O 1x PS/2 Keyboard/Mouse, 8x USB 2.0, 2x USB 3.0, 1x Optical S/PDIF-Out, 1x LAN RJ45, 6x OFC Audio Jacks

Futuremark PC Mark 8 Results
Home 3206
Creative 2806
Work 3122

VERDICT
Interesting mix of innovations for an AMD offering.

V P F D U

Status Red

by din

ASUS ROG GTX 980 Matrix Platinum

Ever since NVIDIA unveiled its flagship GPU chipset, the GTX 980, I had been waiting for somebody to take it, combine it with better cooling, give it a cool design, and add on a power tweak. Frankly, the basic reference GTX 980 card that NVIDIA sent to PC.com before had really blown my mind away. What would it be like more when it's updated by a third-party manufacturer? For the month of January, my prayers had been answered as ASUS decided to give the GTX980 its own flair by adding in some proprietary enhancements. Thusly, the ASUS ROG GTX 980 Matrix Platinum had been born. Boy oh boy, I can't wait to test this baby out!

SIMPLY RED

The ROG, aka 'Republic of Gamers' line by ASUS has always been infamous among gamers - in a good way. Users can expect high quality as well as better performance ratings when they acquire a product that is sold in this line. The

GTX 980 Matrix Platinum is no exception. Coming in within a very large red box, a usual identity of the ROG, it is surprisingly sparse as the contents within comprise the GPU - safely cocooned in a shell of foam, an ROG sticker, the necessary drivers as well as some adapter cables to use if your PSU does not come with the 8-Pin GPU power connector that the card needs.

RED IS THE WORD

Having tested the original reference design GTX 980, the ROG GTX 980 Matrix Platinum is as different as night and day. ASUS has replaced the reference cooler with its own DirectCU II system, a proven platform that is renowned for having the best cooling solution out there. The improved dual Cooltech fan, combined with the 10mm heatpipe is 25% cooler, hence giving it much better performance headroom when it is under any load. The new design also ensures that it is also three times quieter. In terms of design, the

heatsink is now pure black, making it look even cooler than the previous incarnation of the Matrix Platinum. Two red accents also add to this awesome look. At the side, an LED-lit ASUS ROG logo can be found. The LED will change colour depending on the GPU's load so you know when it is being pushed. Perfect for casings that have massive side windows. To make sure the graphics system does not bend under its own weight (believe me, it's really heavy), ASUS provided a large back aluminium plate on it. This helps disperse heat during operation as well as add to the overall awesome look of the card.

RED ARROW

Complementing the good looks of the ROG GTX 980 Matrix Platinum is the tweaked high performance it offers. Out of the box, ASUS has overclocked the card to run on a bumped up clock speed of 1241Mhz. This can boost up to 1342Mhz. Too slow for you? Don't worry as the card

VERDICT
Overkill is under-rated so ASUS went all out!
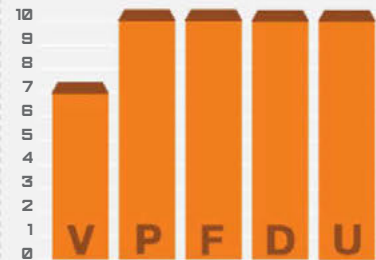
also rocks three BIOS add-ons. The first is normal speed settings while the second unlocks the highest value the GPU can achieve, which can be then overclocked by the user, and the third is a safe mode, a function that will revert the graphics back to its original settings. To ensure that you will get a stable overclock, the modified GTX 980 sports a dual 8-Pin GPU connector. Note: this is totally different from the dual 6-Pin plug found on the reference system. To make it easier for users to overclock the card, ASUS has also included the ASUS GPU Tweak app - a direct, easy to learn overclocking tool made specifically for ASUS GPUs. Not only does it lets you change the GPU clockspeed, it also manages the Voltage and keeps track of the temperature levels as well.

THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER
Knowing that some extreme overclockers love to use liquid nitrogen for their work, you will find a 4-Pin Molex connector at the back of the card. This is for the Memory Defroster function - a system that will quickly defrost frozen memory module due to negative temperatures that are usually associated with nitro-cooling. With it, the ASUS graphics entry will instantly be ready without having to wait for it to warm up. It also sports ASUS' DIGI+ VRM to ensure a stable power supply is always present during overclocking.

FOUR IN RED
At the rear of the ROG GTX 980 Matrix Platinum, ASUS has decided not to follow the NVIDIA reference that sports two DVI jacks, one HDMI port, and a DisplayPort. Instead, this GPU has only one DVI slot, one HDMI connector, and three DisplayPorts. This is due to the growing number of monitors that are using DisplayPort as well as the higher bandwidth offering that DisplayPort supports. The GPU itself is made for 4K gaming as well as multiple monitor setups. Feeling that a single card is not enough? Well the GTX 980 Matrix Platinum can be combined with three other ROG GTX 980 Matrix Platinum graphics platforms in a FOUR WAY SLi combination. I can't imagine why one would need a four-way SLi when one card is enough. Then again, the potential is there if you want it. What I love about the SLi tab is that ASUS has raised it a little, making it easier to plug in the SLi ribbon without interfering with the rest of the system.

RED HOT
I tested the ASUS GTX 980 entry using a Samsung 120Hz gaming monitor and set all of my games on the highest possible settings. For Battlefield 4, the graphics processor performs admirably well with frames going at a constant high 100~80FPS. On Titanfall, it is the same story as my fragging session had been as smooth as a baby's bottom. I also tested it on a triple monitor setting, running racing sim, Asetto Corsa. It still just marched along fine without any lag or stutter. The ROG GTX980 Matrix Platinum card is honestly the best card out there. Hands down.

Competent Midrange

ZTE Blade Vec Pro

by matthew yap

SCORE

SILVER
PC.com
RECOMMENDED
AWARD

7.0

RM788

Hoping to snare the local budget conscious consumers, ZTE launched a whole range of smartphones ranging from entry level to flagship in October 2014. Naturally, ZTE was kind enough to send us some review units of the midrange Blade V5, which was wrote about last month, and the Blade Vec Pro for this review.

SLIP OF A PHONE

Though just one notch higher on the range, the Blade Vec Pro is more similar to the Star 1 than the Blade V5. Its sleek and slim profile is lightweight enough that you might not even feel it in your pocket sometimes. At the front is the 5-inch display 720p, with the 5MP front facing camera, while the 13MP rear facing camera is, obviously, at the rear. On the right side of the phone you have the power button and the volume rocker, while the two 3G SIM slots are on the other side.

FAMILY FRIENDLY

What about features? A noticeable feature is the Family Mode, which turns the phone into a series of large tiles. The closes use I can think of is that it's for children, or elderly people who need the larger fonts to read text and navigate the phone. Other than that, the Vec Pro is as vanilla Android Kitkat as it gets.

AVERAGE PERFORMER

Powering the Blade Vec Pro is a 1.4GHz MT6592 Octa-core processor with 1GB of RAM, just enough for some web browsing, social media and maybe a few simple 2D games. It's not a multi-tasking powerhouse, but it gets by. The battery life is decent, even though it's only a 2200 mAh, and likely to last you through work or school before you have to charge it.

TOUGH COMPETITION AHEAD

The ZTE Blade Vec Pro is for all purposes, a capable midrange phone. Unfortunately, the problem is that it doesn't stand out against its other competitors. Its asking price also makes it a hard choice to pick, when you can pay just a bit more for flagship devices from other brands. ▣

SPECS
Dimensions
142.3 x 70.4 x 7.8 mm
Weight 152 g
Chipset MediaTek MTK6592 ARM-Cortex-A7
Graphics Mali-450
Memory 1GB RAM
Display 5 inches, colour IPS TFT 720 x 1280 pixels
Camera 13MP rear-facing, 5MP front-facing
Storage
8GB, expandable via microSD
Operating System
Android 4.4.2 Kitkat
Battery 2200 mAh

Benchmark
3DMark Ice Storm Extreme xx
Antutu xx
Basemark X High Quality 6307
Anomaly 2 High Quality 394394
GFXBench Manhattan
535 (8.6 fps)
GFXBench Manhattan
1080p 502 (8.1 fps)
GFXBench T-Rex 972 (17.4 fps)
GFXBench T-Rex
1080p Offscreen 923 (16.5 fps)

VERDICT

Decent midrange, but not competitively priced.

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8
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6
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3
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0

V P F D U

Falling Star

ZTE Star 1 by sia zhen ning

RM1,088

With the amount of Chinese smartphones swarming into the market, it had only been a matter of time until one of them turns out to be a dud. For me, that wait is over as the ZTE Star 1 is one of the more unimpressive phones I've tried in a while. But before I share about my mixed experiences, there are a few things that I do like about the smartphone.

GLOSSY SHELL

Personally, I really like the overall look of the ZTE Star 1. The smartphone is incredibly smooth to the touch, thanks to the material used on the back cover of the phone. Its design is pretty sleek as the device's top and bottom half rounds off as the chassis curves backwards. A nice touch indeed, instead of being the traditional rectangular brick.

STRAIGHT-UP

As for longevity, the Star 1 is on the average side. It doesn't eat up the battery like some other smartphones do, but it isn't exactly long lasting either. Continuing the slew of average averageness is the camera. It is perfectly functional, but otherwise, there is nothing about it that stands out.

MIXED PERFORMANCE

But the truly disappointing part comes in the performance part of the Star 1. The smartphone is prone to sudden slowdowns for no reason. I've tried closing all the apps before using it and I've even fully reset the phone, but it keeps happening for no apparent reason. When it comes to benchmarking, the Star 1 performs just as well as the competition so I suspect it might be because this review unit is a testbed system or a pre-launch platform that hasn't been fully optimised.

JUST LOOKS

The battery and camera is passable, while the performance is mediocre. I'd say one of the best things I have seen on the ZTE Star 1 is the overall design and styling. Now if only the system operates just as well. PC

SPECS
Dimension 139 x 69 x 6.6 mm
Weight 130g
Processor Qualcomm MSM8928 Snapdragon 400
Memory 2GB RAM
Graphics Adreno 305
Storage 16GB + microSD up to 64GB
OS Android OS, v4.4.2 (KitKat)
Camera 8MP Rear Facing, 5MP Front Facing
Battery Li-Po 2300mAh battery
Connectivity Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/n dual band, Bluetooth v4.0

VERDICT

Mixed bag that will swing either way.

V P F D U

A Pocket Breather

ASUS STRIX GTX 960   by din

Much has been talked about the new Maxwell architecture by NVIDIA. A low TDP chipset that does not skimp on performance, the GTX 980 and GTX 970 have proven to be favourites among hardcore gamers around the world. But those chips are on the high-end, and hence, commands a premium price. For a while, there are no Maxwell based card for the mid-entry level. The lowest priced Maxwell was the old GTX 750, which is not really suited for any gaming rig. This has been rectified when NVIDIA announced a new Maxwell GPU codenamed GM206. Manufactured to be lower costing than the previous GM204 that can be found in the GTX 980 and GTX 970, the new architecture contains what made both of these GPUs to be awesome but without needing to meet the premium pricing. The first card that this chip powers is the new NVIDIA GTX 960.

SILENT KILLER

It is good to see that ASUS quickly released its own graphics take on the new Maxwell GM206. The results? The coming of the ASUS STRIX GTX 960 DirectCU II. Upon receiving the box, I knew I had a winner in my grubby hands. The box might not be big, but - trust me, you'd be surprised on how hefty it truly is. Opening the box, you will be greeted with a large black box that contains the GPU that is safe protected with foam. You will also get a DVI to VGA converter, for those that still are using relic monitors, a manual, driver DVD, as well as an ASUS STRIX sticker. It's something of a norm for ASUS Graphic Card packages now.

LARGE EYES

As with all ASUS product that are geared for gaming, the ASUS STRIX GTX 960 DirectCU II comes fully black tinged with red accentuates. Characterised for ASUS STRIX GPUs, the dual-fan had been designed to look like an owl's face when looked from the top. Like other GPUs, this ASUS STRIX entry is using the tried and tested ASUS proprietary DirectCU II cooler, now tweaked to be 20% cooler than the reference NVIDIA cooling design. Interestingly, the GTX 960 PCB is at least 2/3rd shorter than the basic DirectCU II. This allows for a lot more surface area to work with, leading to better cooling performance by the heatsink.

KILLER LOOKS

The ASUS STRIX not only makes the card look cool as it literally works to be cool (pun very much intended) and silent. The dual-fan is programmed not to engage or spin unless the GPU passes the 50% threshold. This means that under normal circumstances, like Web browsing or work related stuff, you won't hear a thing from it. This is achieved not only by using the large DirectCU II heatsink as the aluminium backplate used on the back of the card also helps with heat dissipation. The new Maxwell platform also has a TDP of only 120W, ensuring that only low heat is generated.

PUSHING THE LIMIT

To make sure that you will have the best performance that you can get from this GPU, ASUS has slightly overclocked it to perform at 1253Mhz, up from the default

clock of 1127Mhz. Even the boost clock has been pushed to whooping 1316Mhz - an increase from 1178Mhz. This updated performance is helped by the rather superb cooling used. Of course, that also means you can still manually overclock this graphics to go even higher. Ensuring all this works seamlessly, 2GB GDDR5 of memory, which ASUS overclocked to 7200Mhz, is also used. Amazingly, this GPU entry already supports DirectX12, something that Microsoft is set to release alongside Windows 10 next year. So it's kind of good to be ready. For those that has bought ASUS' gaming monitor with G-SYNC, you would be happy to know this new GTX 960 also supports the proprietary function as well.

LOOK AT YOU!

In term of output, the ASUS STRIX GTX 960 DirectCU II rocks a single DVI connector, a HDMI port, and three DisplayPort jacks. With newer monitors supporting DisplayPort, this configuration is a logical step forward. Surround Monitor setup is supported by the card out of the box, although you would need three exact same monitors to achieve this. For those who feel the performance of this card is lacking, a single SLi connector can be found for multi-GPU setup as well. The low 120W TDP means that the card only needs a single 6-Pin GPU connector. There is also an LED status indicator that lights up red when there is no power provided to the GPU.

EXTRAS, READ ALL ABOUT IT

To make sure that you have the upmost complete control on your card, the ASUS STRIX GTX 960 DirectCU II comes with the latest ASUS GPU Tweak software. This not only lets you see the status of your card - like speed and temperature ratings, but also let you change the power as well as overclock your card manually. Alongside this is also the ASUS Gamecaster - an ASUS optimised Xsplit based software that allows you to not only livestream your game but also record the game directly at the same time.

COMING IN

I tested the ASUS STRIX GTX 960 DirectCU II in various gaming situations, including playing Asetto Corsa and rFactor 2 on a triple monitor system as well as Battlefield 4 and Titanfall on a 120Hz monitor. All these games are pegged at medium setting since that's the target of this GPU. Honestly, I am very satisfied with the performance. Even when set to low graphic intensive games like DotA2 - most of the time the fans do not even engage until there is a lot of particles or effects on the screen. The ASUS STRIX GTX 960 DirectCU II is an amazing card, especially if you're looking for something that performs well in the mid-range category. Not only that, due to its size, it also makes a good GPU for a small living room box. Silent and powerful, what more can you ask for? PC

SPECS
Dimensins (W x H x D)
215mm x 121mm x 41mm
GPU NVIDIA GeForce GTX 960
Bus Standard PCI Express 3.0
Memory GDDR5 2GB
Clock - OC 1253Mhz (117Mhz)
Clock - Gaming 1228Mhz (1291Mhz Boost)
CUDA Core 1024
Memory Clock 7200 MHz
Memory Interface 128-bit
Output 1x DVI, 1x HDMI, 3x DP
Accessories 1x DVI to VGA Adaptor, 1x STRIX Laser Sticker

3D Mark
3132 (Fire Strike Extreme)

VERDICT
New frontiers for Maxwell.

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V P F D U
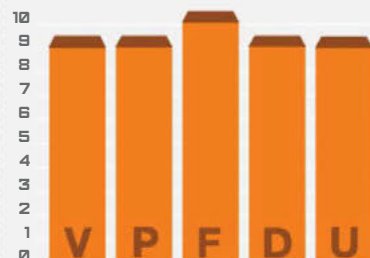
Beyond Exquisite

**Bang & Olufsen
BeoVision Avant 85 4K TV**

by victor yap

RM125,000

When it comes to LED TVs, only a few major brands come to mind. One wouldn't think of a sound system player moving up the rank to fit right in. However, Bang & Olufsen (B&O) believes otherwise as it has moved into the display panel business to show all-comers how it is properly done. In this case, B&O focused on the chassis design, the viability of its advance features, and the enhanced user control aspects that the smart app used within offers. Enter the B&O BeoVision Avant 85 4K TV.

BIG SETUP

For an 85in panel, you'd think two would be adequate to put everything together. While I did not have the pleasure of assembling the entire thing, the General Manager of B&O Malaysia, Danny Chong, shared how it took three to four of his guys to setup the Avant 85 in the showroom for the launch. While it only took 30 minutes

to set it up, the very idea of needing four men to build the whole thing is a little incredulous.

HUGELY VIVID

It can be said that there are not many in the market that can put out an impressive display performance when it comes to larger-than-usual panels. Most times, such screens would be dim on parts of the panel - due to an under-performing local dimming system, or using a contrast balance that can only do so much on a big screen. Obviously, the Avant 85 manages to address these issues as the 85in 4K panel punched out some great balances in the hues, colours, and bright levels. There is only one minor problem that I had encountered throughout my review: the whites being a little washed-out. I suspect this is due to full LED backlight the panel uses as those are known to soften rich colours when it's not configured properly.

However, the 4K visuals more than make up for the slight over-saturation.

UNIQUE CONTROLS

In terms of design, the Avant 85 is truly in a class of its own. While there had been over-sized screens in the market already, the proposition B&O has in mind is very much its own take on the idea. Instead of just being an oversized display panel that produce enriched visuals, this B&O entry puts together a comprehensive control system to fully complement the visual processing and elegant design the TV uses. Simply put, once the TV is up and running, there is no need for manual physical adjustments or tweaking as the primary remote can be used to turn the entire panel to a certain angle or be nudged over to fit nicely with the wall panelling at the back. This is all managed via the intricate motorised actuator that is embedded within the panel and stand. Not keen on a

floor-stand? B&O also has a solution for that - a pivot stand that allows the big panel to be mounted onto a wall (side-mounted dock pivot). There is a table pivot too but that is confined to just the 55in model. Both also use the same mechanical motor that is present in the stand.

EASY STORING

Beyond providing easier controls, the motorised actuator provides a special element that is distinctive to the Avant 85. When not in active use, the TV will automatically flip over by 180-degrees in a slow yet classy manner. The movement is accentuated further when the stand rotates as well. This is a literal sign that the panel has shut down for the day. While the entire idea is definitely one-of-a-kind, there is one issue that users have to contend with - needing enough room in the rear to allow for the panel to rotate into that position. This means having precise measurements from the wall to ensure no unwanted accidents occur.

AURAL COMPANION

Exquisite design paired with exceptional 4K video processing definitely makes for a good TV display panel. That would be adequate for any brand, truly. However, this is a B&O product and, thus, it would be a dis-service to the brand if it does not include a high performance speaker

system on the panel. Hence why B&O included a highly sophisticated sound stage on the Avant 85. How sophisticated you ask? For starters, the sound bar slides down and opens up in the same elegant manner when the TV is turned on. Such a classy move immediately speaks of the build quality of the accompanying audio equipment used. Of course, within the smart looking grill are a pair of 2in side mid-range speakers, two 3/4in side tweeters, and a central speaker unit that comprises a 4in bass, and an audio pair that consist of a 3/4in tweeter and 2in centre mid-ranger. Complementing all that is an embedded 6.5in subwoofer that is located at the back of the TV. This 3.1 offering definitely delivered the goods as it managed to encompass the entire sound room that the Avant 85 had been placed in, delivering every aural nuance the video content had to offer.

PERFECT BALANCE

B&O is known for offering its great audio products and advance yet contemporary design. These characteristics are shown and reinforced on the Avant 85 through the awesome features and functions it offers. If anything, this 4K panel shows how a great display can be fully complemented with an innovative form factor and powerful sound delivery. This TV certainly proves itself of the B&O name.

SPECS
Dimensions (W x H x D)
199.2 x 120.1 x 12.7 (without stand)
199.2 x 160.6 x 69.0 (floor stand)
Materials Anodised Aluminium
Display
16:9 TFT LCD with Direct-Type LED and 2D Local Backlight Dimming with Anti-Glare
Resolution
Ultra HD with 3D Function
Refresh Rate 100Hz/120Hz
Luminance 450cd/m2
Contrast Ratio 5000:1
Picture Optimisation
VisionClear Technology
Sound
3.1 Channel Surround with 8 Amps
Ports 3x RJ45 Sockets for IR Controls, 1x Mini-AV, 2x USB, 1x Ethernet RJ45 10/100, 6x HDMI, 1x SPDIF, 5x RJ45 Power Link for Bang & Olufsen BeoLab Speakers

VERDICT

The true definition of a super high-end 4K display.

V P F D U

Thrifty Gaming

ASUS ROG G551J Gaming Notebook by sia zhen ning

RM3,499

Affordability has never been a forte of gaming notebooks. Their prices usually start at around the RM4K mark and go upwards from there. If you wanted a gaming notebook, you're going to have to pay a pretty penny to own one. ASUS has probably realised that there are many who would like to own a gaming notebook but price points prohibit most people from getting one. The G551J is ASUS' attempt at a budget gaming notebook, and, personally, it's a dream come true!

JET BLACK SHELL

Compared to its other siblings in the ASUS RoG series, the G551J is nowhere near as big or bulky as them. Its size is typical of a 15.6in notebook. The entire casing of the machine is coloured black with the RoG emblem located at the centre. Opening up the notebook reveals the 15.6in screen as well as the full keyboard that glows a

deep and vivid red when the notebook is powered on.

ENERGETIC INNARDS

So what does a sub-4K Ringgit Malaysia gaming notebook net you? A decent set of components is the answer. First off, it comes with an Intel Core i7-4710HQ that can be overclocked to 3.5GHz. The notebook itself features 4GB RAM and comes with a 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 860M graphics card. If you feel that this a bit underpowered, you can opt for the more powerful variant that comes with 8GB RAM and a 4GB GTX 860M instead. Of course, that configuration breaks the RM4K mark.

LASTS LONG ENOUGH

Battery life on gaming notebooks isn't exactly stellar and the G551J is no exception. Gaming on this notebook

will drain the battery in roughly an hour and a half, depending on the types of games you're playing. If you're using the notebook for productivity purposes, you can probably hit the three-hour mark - pretty common for these kinds of notebooks in my opinion. Needless to say, you probably want to carry around the power brick whenever you leave home with this notebook.

POWER PLAY

When it comes to gaming, some limitations are to be expected when the platform is priced below the RM4K mark. This notebook is capable of running slightly older games, such as Starcraft II and Diablo 3 at Very High and Ultra settings without much fuss. However, more recent games such as Shadows of Mordor and Wolfenstein will cause the notebook to choke when the settings are

SPECS

Dimension 383 x 255 x 31.5 mm
Weight 2.7kg
Processor Intel Core i7-4710HQ (Turbo up to 3.5GHz, 6M cache)
Memory 4GB DDR3L 1600MHz SDRAM
Graphics NVIDIA GeForce GTX 860M 2GB GDDR5
Display 15.6 inch Full HD IPS (1920 x 1080) LED Backlit
Storage SATA 1TB (5400rpm)
Connectivity 802.11a/b/g/n, 10/100/1000Mbit/s Ethernet, Bluetooth 4.0
Ports 1x mini DisplayPort, 3x USB 3.0, 1x HDMI, 1x SD/MMC, 1x audio jack combo
Battery
Li-ion 56Wh (5200 mAh, 6 cells)

Benchmarks
PCMark 8 Home 2738
PCMark 8 Creative 2770
PCMark 8 Work 3014

3DMark Cloud Gate 15610
3DMark Sky Diver 11679
3DMark Fire Strike 3697

VERDICT

A powerful gaming notebook at an affordable price.

maxed out. Don't get me wrong, it can definitely handle both games just fine on Medium-High settings, but it does not have the raw horsepower needed to run the game at full details while keeping the framerate at above 20fps.

HEAT SIGNATURE

This notebook isn't without its issues. For starters, I'm not really a big fan of the in-built speakers as it is really subpar. If you're used to super-fast boot times, because your Ultrabook, notebook, or whatever contains an SSD, then you might be disappointed to hear that the G551J does not contain an SSD as it opts for a single 1TB SATA drive instead. However, what worries me the most is the heat levels this notebook generates. When on load, it managed to hit the 85-degree Celsius mark, an uncomfortably high rate for a notebook. The air coming out of the

vent port is very hot as well, so if you're a left handed mouse user, that is going to be a pain to deal with.

BUDGET GAMING

So is the G551J a gaming notebook worth buying? The answer is most definitely. The G551J is a powerful little thing for a great price that is worth considering by anyone who has a tight budget. If you're expecting top-of-the-line performance out of this, you're probably expecting too much out of an affordably priced gaming notebook. What you pay is what you get when it comes to gaming and, as such, don't expect it to be a notebook that eats all sorts of games for breakfast. If you're not the kind of person that wants everything to be maxed out and maintain a 60fps framerate, then the G551J is hands down the best budget gaming notebook available on the market.

● RM1,588

Boldly Nostalgic

BlackBerry Classic

by sia zhen ning

SPECS
Dimension (W x H x D)
131 x 72.4 x 10.2mm
Weight 177g
Processor Dual Core 1.5 GHz Krait
Graphics Adreno 225
Memory 2GB RAM
Display 3.5in capacitive
touchscreen, 720 x 720 resolution
Storage 16GB internal, microSD
up to 128GB
Camera 8MP rear, 2MP front
Operating System
Blackberry 10.3.1 OS
Battery 2515 mAh Li-Ion Battery

VERDICT
A modern day BlackBerry with an
old school design.

V P F D U

Back when I had been just a little lad, the BlackBerry had always been the phone that only businessmen or those higher-up in the corporate ladder would ever own. Nowadays though, with smartphones getting cheaper by the minute, I had all but forgotten that the BlackBerry still exists. So I had been rather amused when I received the BlackBerry Classic for review. I even stopped to wonder if the advent of smartphones has made the BlackBerry obsolete. Spoiler alert - it hasn't.

A BOLD THROWBACK
As the name probably goes, the Blackberry Classic's design is a call back to the good old days of BlackBerry phones. As such, the Classic is pretty much a throwback to the original BlackBerry Bold but with some extra twists that warrants a redesigned tag on it. In comparison with the smartphones

of today, the BlackBerry has a shorter, albeit wider frame than most smartphones in the market today.

KEYS TO THE KINGDOM
The biggest selling point of the Blackberry Classic has to be its QWERTY keyboard. Coming from years of touchscreen-based keyboard, I have to say that I enjoyed the tactile feedback of the Classic's keyboard. Not only is it big enough for my fingers to work on without too many errors, it also happens to be very responsive. However, the trade-off for using this is the screen size being made as one the smallest screens I've come across.

PRODUCTIVITY IN MIND
If you've never used a BlackBerry before, I suggest reading through the manual before navigating it as the device can be

rather confusing for a first timer. Once you worked pass that though, the Classic is a great device for productivity purposes.

NOSTALGIA ISN'T LOST
One minor downside to the BlackBerry Classic is the fact that it runs on BlackBerry OS. This leads to a lack of apps when compared to Android Play and iTunes Store. I'd argue, though, that the BlackBerry doesn't need the app catalogue like Android or iOS smartphones as it is designed with a specific purpose in mind. Indeed, if you're looking for a smartphone that maximises productivity, then the BlackBerry is what you want. ▣

Double the Ice

HIS Radeon R9 285 IceQ X2 2GB OC   by din

It's been a while since I last saw a HIS product. For years, it has been one of the most prominent manufacturers of (at the time) ATI Radeon GPUs and had been famous for its competitive pricing and cool designs (pun intended). So it had been a real surprise when I received a HIS product, specifically the HIS Radeon R9 285 IceQ X2 2GB OC card.

COLDILOCKS

The HIS R9 285 IceQ X2 card is based upon the Tonga chipset, one of the newer platforms that has been AMD introduced. The chipset has a lower TDP, meaning quieter and cooler graphic card as well as much more headroom for a performance gain. Indeed, the HIS card comes factory overclocked as well, meaning that you should get some extra performance right out of the box.

ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

The HIS 285 IceQ X2 is large. In a good kind of way though. This is due to the cooler as the main PCB is only 2/3rd the size of the IceQ X2 cooler. This means you are still getting the full benefit of the IceQ X2 cooler, even with a small PCB, as the more surface area there is, the more heat can be dissipated. The heatsink shroud is black, something of a normality for all graphic card nowadays, although I would have preferred it to be in white. Then

again, there is a white HIS sticker going through the middle of the shroud.

ICE QUEEN

HIS has kept to the normal AMD output of dual DVI, one HDMI, and a single DisplayPort. One of the DVI supports analogue with an adapter for those that still rely on a VGA monitor. There are no crossfire pins on this card, a new update on all newer AMD Radeon cards. 2GB of GDDR5 RAM powers this GPU with a core clockspeed of 938MHz.

LET IT GO

So how does HIS Radeon R9 285 IceQ X2 fare? Well as a medium entry card, it's decent. The long and large cooler works like a charm, especially if you're looking to overclock it. Yet it's slim enough that it does not take much room in the casing. Even if cannot crunch games at Ultra settings, but for casual gaming, especially RPGs or DotA 2, this is more than enough. PC

SPECS

Dimensions (W x H x D)
270 x 140 x 42mm
Weight 1.2kg
Chipset AMD R9 285
Memory Size 2GB GDDR5
Memory Clock Up to 5500MHz
Core Clock 938MHz
Memory Interface 256Bit
Expansion
2 x DVI, 1 x DisplayPort,
1 x HDMI with 3D

VERDICT
Cold - in a good sort of way.

V	P	F	D	U

An Owlsome Delight

by matthew yap

ASUS STRIX Gaming Series

SCORE

GOLD
PC.com
CHOICE
AWARD

8.6

RM499

RM199

RM99

Hoot goes the STRIX, or 'owl' as it is known in Greek - a whole new range of gaming peripherals from ASUS. With the current Republic of Gamers (ROG) line, is there really a need for another gaming series? Probably not, but it's here to stay and the Tested Labs just got a whole set of it for review this month.

CLAWING SUCCESS
The ASUS STRIX mouse is clearly meant for right-handed gamers and has enough buttons for Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) or First-Person Shooters (FPS) players. I'm sure there are many gamers who will like the Claw's anodised plastic body as it is lightweight yet has a firm grip. FPS gamers will also enjoy having the DPI clutch button, a mode that allows for extra precision when sniping.

CONTROL IS IMPORTANT
To go with the Claw is the Glide Control mousepad. It works well together somehow as the Claw strafes smoothly on the surface of the Glide Control. The pairing ensures the gaming experience will always be a breeze. Of course, I made sure I adjusted the DPI to my liking for improved results.

TYPIST'S JOY
The heart of the setup is ASUS very first mechanical keyboard - the Tactical Pro.

You get your choice of Cherry MX keys and the unit we got uses those from Cherry MX Blue. I love the tactile feel as it reminds me of typewriters, making it sweet for typing. It's got nearly everything too, with a whopping 21 programmable macros, a macro-type record button, and even multimedia buttons. However, I did hope that a wrist rest had been packed in as well.

TYING IT ALL IN
If there's one thing that's a bit disappointing, it's that the STRIX software still isn't optimised yet. As it is, the feature set is good with customisation of macro keys and functions, profile switching, as well as hardware and software mode. However, probably because of a bug or something else, it lags when switching from mouse to keyboard settings and the CPU usage spikes when that happens. Other than that there's not much to truly complain about. 📕

SPECS
ASUS STRIX Tactical Pro
Type Fully mechanical Cherry MX keys
Anti-ghosting True NKRO (6KRO switch included)
Macro keys 21
Backlit Individually-backlit (orange) keys with 4-level settings
Switch Lifetime
50-million key presses

**ASUS STRIX Claw
RM199**
Size 122.55 x 71.75 x 45.25 (mm)
Weight 110g (without cable)
Cable 2M with gold-plated USB connector
Resolution Native 5000 dpi
Maximum polling 1000Hz

**ASUS STRIX Glide Control
RM99**
Size 400x300mm surface
Depth 3mm
Weight 208 g

VERDICT
ASUS fans would flock to this gaming peripheral set.

10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0

V P F D U

Digitally Processed Sound

ASUS STRIX DSP Gaming Headset

by sia zhen ning

When ASUS first announced the STRIX series of gaming hardware, I already know that at some point in time, it will roll out a whole slew of gaming peripherals outside of the standard offerings of graphics cards. So it is no surprise to me that ASUS launched the STRIX DSP Gaming Headset. Having no prior experience with ASUS headphones, I went into this review with no expectations and came out with some really interesting results.

TIGHT SEAL

There are two components to this gaming headset - the main unit itself and the Digital Sound Processor it uses. Of course, let's focus on the headset for now. In terms of size, this is a really large unit. While it's not as heavy as some other headphones, I won't exactly consider it light either. Putting this headset on reveals that it has a tight clamp to ensure a complete seal, making sound leak a non-issue. Personally, the clamp is pretty uncomfortable.

RM599

OPEN INTERNALS

However, I particularly like how the other side of the ear cups is covered with a transparent plastic, allowing you to see the beastly 60mm drivers in all its glory.

How often does one get to see the internal operations of a headset while it pumps out some tunes? This is why the ASUS STRIX DSP is unique for its class.

POST PROCESSING

Performance of the headset by itself is rather underwhelming. It's not bad but it's not stellar either. Add the DSP into the mix though and the headset suddenly becomes impressive. If you're not one who likes to go muck around with equaliser settings, then the DSP will be highly convenient as the pre-sets are rather decent and the amplification it provides is exceptional as well. One problem though - eventhough the headset is compatible with the PlayStation 4, the DSP isn't. Therefore, if you're looking to get a headset for your console, this one may not be the best choice. If you primarily game on your PC, this headset is one to look for; if you're more of a console gamer, give this one a pass. PC

SPECS
Weight 320g
Drivers 60 mm Neodymium magnet
Frequency response 20 – 20000 Hz
Sensitivity 98 dB
Impedance 32 ohm
Connectivity Braided fibre cable (headset cable 1.5M + USB cable 1.5M = 3M (Max.)

VERDICT
A great combo for the PC, not so much for consoles.

V P F D U

Crafted For MOBA

Logitech G302 Daedalus Prime

by sia zhen ning

SCORE

7.8

RM129

SPECS
Weight 127g
Dimension (W x H x D)
115 x 65 x 37mm
Sensitivity 4000 dpi
Buttons 6 programmable buttons
Response 1000 Hz (1ms)
Connection USB

VERDICT
A small mouse for a small palm.

V P F D U

There is a mouse for everything. There are gaming mice for first-person shooters, Massive Multiplayer Online RPGs, and now Logitech has revealed a mouse that is purpose-made for Massive Online Battle Arenas. Say high to the Logitech G302 Daedalus Prime, a tiny rodent that solely focuses on being mobile and deadly.

QUICK RESPONSE
In summary and as expected of Logitech, the G302 performs really well. Its sensors are highly accurate and the lightweight nature makes this a very responsive mouse. The six programmable buttons are all placed conveniently and within easy reach for fuss-free operation. True convenience at its best.

MINUTE FORM
Unlike some of Logitech's other mice, the G302 is small when compared to its siblings. The shape of this conceptual gaming mouse is more rounded than most mice out there. Coming from someone who has used the Hyperion Fury for some time now, the shift to the G302 takes some getting used to and, truth be told, not as comfortable as the better Logitech clicking peripherals that I had come across. 🅿

SCORE

8.4

Audio on the Go

by sia zhen ning

Logitech X300 Mobile Wireless Bluetooth Stereo Speaker

RM259

SPECS
Dimension (W x H x D)
69 x 152 x 71mm
Weight 335 g
Transmission range 33 ft
Connectivity Bluetooth

VERDICT
An unexpectedly powerful wireless speaker.

V P F D U

When it comes to audio, I prefer my headphones or speakers wired. So when I've first gotten the Logitech X300 to review, I pretty much expected to write it off as a novelty. However, and to my surprise, the X300 is mind-blowingly decent.

BULKING UP
Bluetooth speakers are mainly built for portability. Thusly, the X300 is fairly bulky. This isn't exactly a machine that you hook onto a carabiner and start hiking Mount Kilimanjaro with; it's more suited for parties or picnics. However, this extra bulk makes the X300 fairly durable. The back of the device is coated with a plastic rubber material, making it unlikely to slip out of your hands when you carry it around.

SURPRISINGLY POWERFUL
I had been totally expecting the sound coming out of the speaker to be subpar at best. Instead, the X300 surprises me by putting out some really powerful audio processing. I personally attribute this to the size of the device as it seems that the extra bulk allows Logitech to cram in a more powerful speaker system within. 🅿

Message From Mercury

POFOKO Mercury Series 15.6in Messenger Bag

by sia zhen ning

RM69

Personally, carrying an Ultrabook around inside a full-sized notebook bag seems to be overdoing it. There is just so much space remaining inside the bag that it seems highly unnecessary. However, carrying an Ultrabook out in the open is a stupid idea as this just makes you a target for snatch thieves or worse. Sometimes a small carry bag is all you need - like the POFOKO Mercury Series bag.

SMALL AND LIGHT

There is much to like about the Mercury Series Messenger Bag. For one, the bag is very thin when compared to other messenger bags that I've seen and used over the years. The main compartment for the Ultrabook itself is pretty cool as there is a thick layer of padding for both sides of the bag, allowing for improved shock absorbing performance. This ensures your device is protected from damage. There are also a few compartments on the sides of the bag, allowing you to store your chargers and cables.

TIGHT FIT

Just so we are clear, this bag is meant for Ultrabooks, tablets, or notebooks that are very slim. Therefore, if you have a medium sized mobile PC, you should avoid purchasing this bag as it would be too small for your needs.

SPECS
Dimensions 38.5 x 3 x 28.5 cm
Weight 300g

VERDICT
A notebook carrier tailor-made for very thin devices.

V P F D U

Venusian Backpack

POFOKO Venus Series 15.6in Backpack

by sia zhen ning

POFOKO's Venus Series is a stark contrast to its Mercury range. Where the latter is made specifically for small form factor notebooks, the former is meant for the standard notebook sizes. So with so many notebooks bags available on the market, why should opt for this one in particular?

AMPLE SPACE

Being a notebook bag made for bigger form factors, the Venus series is obviously going to be bigger than the Mercury series. Truth be told, it is slightly larger than most standard notebook backpacks. However, its size would bear little complaints once you open it up and find out that it has incredible amount of space. You can fit a full-sized 15in notebook as well as three college-sized textbooks alongside with no difficulty.

COMPARTMENTALISED STORAGE

Apart from space, the Venus series also comes with numerous compartments - both inside and outside of the backpack. This is great for storing cables, USB peripherals, and stationeries without jumbling all of them up into a single compartment. Overall, the Venus Series is for those that would like to stuff their notebook as well as documents into one backpack.

RM98

SPECS
Dimensions 35 x 46 x 16 cm
Weight 300g

VERDICT
Big and very useful indeed.

V P F D U

Wireless Eye

SCORE

8.4

Aztech WIPC409HD Wireless-N Camera

by sia zhen ning

RM369

Wireless security cameras are become a common sight these days as the fear of having being broken into is a great motivator for extra security. It's no surprise that peripheral maker, Aztech, has brought out the WIPC409HD (409HD) camera for those who are a tad bit cautious. Is it worth your time?

JACKED IN
For starters, setting up the 409HD is very straightforward. Hook this up into a power socket and connect it to your modem/router, then download the app. Link the camera to the app via QR code scan. Once done, plug in the microSD and mount the device - hey presto, all is good!

CONNECTION PERFORMANCE
Performance on the other hand, depends heavily on your home Internet's connection and the video output of the camera. During the review, the camera is able to work well at 360p resolution. However, at 1080p, the camera slows down to a slideshow.

SPECS
Dimensions 116 x 112 x 90
Weight 275g
Sensor CMOS sensor, 1,000,000 pixels
Connectivity 802.11b/g/n Wireless Standard
Coverage 355° Horizontal, 120° Vertical
Interface 10Base-T /100 Base-TX Self Adaptive Ethernet Port, SD Slot (up to 64GB TF/SD card), Audio Input/Output Interface

VERDICT
An easy to use camera for the everyday person.

V P F D U

Fiercely Huge
by din

SCORE

8.6

MSI DRAGON ARMY 'Dragon Shield' Backpack

As a notebook owner, there is one thing that's very important for me - how to carry your notebook around. While many would go for a simple backpack, those with a gaming notebook, such as the MSI GT72 2PE Dominator Pro, a normal backpack will not suffice. This is due to the size and weight of the gargantuan gaming platform being heavier.

MINIMALIST RED
From the onset, the Dragon Shield is very large. Compared to the notebook bag that I am currently using, it looks like it could pack in 50% more than normal. However, the design is minimalistic - with a black colour scheme combined with red accents.

COMFORTABLY CONVENIENT
There are three separate compartment found within - all of them the same size. I feel it's best to have a combination of small and large compartments since you don't waste space. If you want to put in smaller things in the Dragon Shield, the middle has a special compartment within made specifically for that. Complementing the content capabilities is the padded rear. Promising that no objects from inside the bag will poke out or pinch your shoulders, this backpack is one of the most comfortable I have ever come across.

SPECS
Bundled with the MSI GT72 2PE Dominator Pro Superpack

VERDICT
You can fit anything here but the kitchen sink.

V P F D U

Rise of the Sleeping Dragons

by sia zhen ning

Chinese smartphones have gained ground of late.
What spurred this trend?

lenovo. FOR THOSE WHO DO.

A few years back, the smartphone scene saw Apple's iPhones and Samsung's GALAXY series of Android smartphones storm and dominate the marketspace with a 'take no prisoners' attitude. For that long period, it seemed that the stranglehold both companies have would be nigh unbreakable. While bets are off on their dominance, something big rocked the status quo - new, high-breed, and super competitive smart devices from beyond the Great Firewall started appearing.

Indeed, late 2013 saw smart device and network hardware companies from China - both well-established and borne in the guise of fire-cracking upstarts - introduce their own smartphones into the Mainland. Their proliferation changed everything as these smartphones, while not the most highly sophisticated available at the time, had one thing that Samsung and Apple do not have - affordability. All of a sudden, smartphones aren't reserved for only those of upper-middle class standing.

People living at the lower-end of the wealth spectrum now can get a really good smartphone for less than RM500. Those that previously purchase smartphones that are priced at RM1,000 and above realised that these China-made smartphones perform just as well as the devices from Samsung, Sony, or Apple. Thus, many customers have flocked over to adopt these partly established yet mostly untested offerings instead.

Now let's fast forward to the here and now, where the world has experienced the inevitable. Once unthinkable and unprecedented, the Chinese companies are now among the Top 5 smartphone makers in the mobile device industry. Of the three, two are well-known in their respective marketspaces while the third has risen from obscurity to full brand prominence under 12 months.

(From left) Hara, Tadakoro, Imai, Ohashi, and Numakura pulling off a gunshot during the exclusive media engagement.

A YEAR OF PROMISE

So how have the Chinese smartphone makers done in Malaysia?

According to IDC, 2014 has been an extremely great year for them. "Chinese smartphones have recorded a significant growth in 2014 compared to 2013, taking a considerable portion of the market share from other well-known tech giants, such as Samsung, Apple, and Sony. Based on our research data, Chinese smart devices came out strong in the middle of 2014. Among them, Lenovo took charge with the highest market share, followed by Huawei. Another two players that have garnered a strong attention are Xiaomi and OPPO - both currently trailing behind closely the leading pair," says Jensen Ooi, Market Analyst of Client Devices for IDC Malaysia.

Gartner, which carried out its own market studies, reflects the industry analysis of IDC. "According to our research, Chinese manufacturers account for the majority share of the China market as they control nearly 79% of total smartphone sales in Q2 of 2014. In Q3 of the same year, three of the top five smartphone vendors have switched over to Chinese. In fact, Huawei, Xiaomi, and Lenovo grew their collective market share by 4.1% on the overall," says CK Lu, Principal Research Analyst at Gartner.

ASSAULTING THE TITANS

While the top-of-mind brands are now Lenovo, Huawei, Xiaomi, and OPPO - the first being a major ICT player, the next one muddling it big time in the networking space, and the last two playing ball in the mobile space for now, another well-known network industry stalwart jumped into the foray - ZTE. Its return into this space has the back-end player running on max speed as it is not far behind in terms of brand performance.

The presence of these companies and their products have caused Samsung and Apple's combined market share to drop by 7%, totalling at 37% in Q3 2014. Suffice to say, these two device players are starting to get really nervous as the Chinese companies are slowly, but surely, cutting themselves a bigger slice of the pie.

AFFORDABILITY IS PARAMOUNT

What is the key to success for their dominance? The vendors themselves and analysts have unanimously agreed that the price-point of the smartphones is the deal-maker for them all as it is incredibly attractive to those with smaller purchasing capabilities. So what is the magic ingredient used that enabled them to manufacture and sell their smartphones at such affordable entry-points? The answer lies in the products that turnkey chipset solution providers churn out.

Thanks to these board makers, China-branded smartphones do not need to rely on build-to-order components and thus, enable them to reduce the cost of manufacturing a smartphone. This directly lowers the price-point of the smartphone.

"Chinese smartphones brands gain popularity in Malaysia with the introduction of low-end models, followed by the higher-end spec ones from the Chinese manufacturers. As consumers are looking for a smartphone with decent specifications that offers value for money, the Chinese strategy proved to be a great substitute for other devices that other more popular brands produce," says Kenneth Wong, Sales Manager of Blue Kor Sdn Bhd, the local distributor and primary liaison for Meizu Technology.

This low priced strategy has given these upcoming brands the ability to operate at a low margin while maintaining product and service differentiation. The end-goal, of course, is being able to obtain key market share.

WORD OF MOUTH

This strategy has put China into clear focus here. That begs the question: what use is a low-priced smartphone if no one knows about it?

Marketing is still a required necessity for any brand to gain traction among customers. This is where the strategies begin to vary depending on what each company wants. In the case of Lenovo and Huawei, both have already established a name for themselves in the Malaysian market space.

"Our approach is founded in the belief that our audience is not contented to be just a spectator. Instead, they want to participate actively in a dialogue with the brand. Thus, our goal is to develop

(From left) Hara, Tadakoro, Imai, Ohashi, and Numakura pulling off a gunshot during the exclusive media engagement.

a passionate community of users who walk hand-in-hand with us as we move to evangelise about the Lenovo brand," says Khoo Hung Chuan, Country General Manager, Lenovo Malaysia.

Huawei's strategy in Malaysia is somewhat similar to Lenovo's. Sharing on this is Peter Tong, President of the South Pacific Region for the Consumer Business Group of Huawei Technologies as he notes: "The bottomline is this: consumers are looking for the best value that their investments can bring. Because of that, they have become extremely discerning when it comes to specs. Quality products, clearly, form the single most important pillar of remaining profitable - and that's what we want to continually focus on in all our deliverables."

Oppo and Xiaomi does not have the marketing clout of Lenovo and Huawei, so they are forced to find other means to promote their own range of smart devices. The former moved to utilise the tried-and-true method of traditional marketing since it is the brand's area of expertise. The latter, meanwhile, completely eschewed standard advertising conventions as the Internet-powered brand opted to move sales through an e-commerce system. This has revealed Xiaomi's reliance on digital marketing. Even if its hand is open for emulating early on, this shock-and-awe strategy is proving to be successful as it utilises social media in ways that no other

(From left) Hara, Tadakoro, Imai, Ohashi, and Numakura pulling off a gunshot during the exclusive media engagement.

smartphone company has considered. ZTE and Meizu have their own plans as well but they are playing the keeping-mum game and have, so far, kept it all under wraps.

ON HOME GROUND

It's no exaggeration to say the Chinese smart devices are thriving in Malaysia but what about on their own home-soil? According to Gartner, these companies are eating up the China market as well with many carving a huge acquisitions from the market incumbents.

"The effort from the Chinese Technology Ecosystem (CTE), including Chinese white-box manufacturers and turnkey solution providers, has been seriously challenging global brands like Samsung and Sony, in both prices and sale units. We believe that, in China, about 40% of 3G smartphones sold in the Q2 2014 had been below US$100," says Lu.

While that may be the case, the Gartner analyst also reveals how these companies will be experiencing some difficulties in due course as Chinese carriers continue to cut the subsidy pool. He believe this action will result in a substantial price gap between three- and five-mode 4G smartphones as the subsidy is not able to pay off the extra cost for developing and manufacturing more of the latter.

For Lu, this trend reflects how three-mode 4G smartphones will, in the future, account for more than 60% of 4G

smartphones sold in China. While it is in the midst of expanding into the Mainland, Lenovo hints at some of the challenges the other market players face. Primarily, while some Chinese companies are doing well in China, there are many who are hamstrung due to stiff competition, low margins, and potentially facing the end of hyper-growth.

GOING GLOBAL

No company is content with just being dominant in one regional market. This holds true even for China as they move to push into the international market. Thus far, they have made huge strides in the smartphone market as Lenovo, Huawei, and Xiaomi are among the Top 5 biggest smartphone vendors just by market share alone. Particularly impressive is Xiaomi.

While it is known for moving up the rank so quickly, its growth rate is phenomenal as it experienced the highest jump for the quarter, showing an increase of 336%. However, bringing in its mobilephones to the American or European market may prove to be tricky. As many have correctly predicted, Xiaomi recently faced some problems with rolling some of its devices into India as the government banned certain products due to alleged patent infringements.

Primary suspicions of why Chinese companies are reluctant to enter the western market is attributed to their fast and loose mindset when it comes to patents. While the primary four vendors

did not confirm nor deny this notion, the two leading brands did offer some insights in regards to this issue.

"With Huawei, we make it clear how the company supports and respects the rights holders of their patents and intellectual properties. We even support an international system of governance and use IPR protection as one of our key requirements to ensure innovation within continue to flourish," adds Tong.

Khoo of Lenovo provides a different take as he feels patents aren't really as big a problem as many are being lead to believe.

"Patent issues can be managed with proper preparation and research when entering into a new market. For any brand that wants to break out of their mould, all they need to do is capitalise on new ideas and opportunities that come their way. Of course, they also always need to think ahead when making things better for consumers," Khoo shares.

STIGMATISED PRODUCTS

Another possible issue that Chinese companies can expect to face when bringing their devices into the western market is the "Made in China" stigma.

It is not surprising how some are doubtful of the build quality for China-sourced devices as such companies are known to manufacture products with variable levels of reliability. However, Huawei, Lenovo, and Meizu are confident this stigma has no effect on their western efforts.

"This stigmatised and highly controbersial view is less played up than before as many Chinese tech brands are now gaining recognition. In fact, Lenovo is a well-recognised brand in the US as reported by a study that Millward Brown, HD Trade Services, and JWTIntelligence2 carried out. It's no surprise really as we have been creating top-notch products that can compete with other mature brands," says Khoo.

"If you look at IDC's top selling smartphone brands, the Chinese are now among the very best. Undoubtedly, the profile for Mainland China brands has grown. However, let's be clear here - consumers look for value. Today's digital natives will take on a brand, irrespective of its home-ground, if their lifestyle needs are met. As long as the Chinese, and other national or state-employed firms, continue to deliver on such expectations, they will certainly be able to garner goodwill among consumers," adds Tong.

Wong, who is of similar thought, adds:

"We do not think the stigma against China-made products are as strong as it used to. However, we will not deny that such notions are completely based on an individual's experience with China-made devices. Frankly, I'd say that once people have tried our products, their opinions may change about such devices."

Suffice to say, Chinese devices have been viewed with a far more favourable light in recent years.

2015 - RAMMINGLY PROSPEROUS?

With the performance of the Chinese companies throughout 2014 being nothing short of stellar, 2015 is poised to be the moment Chinese companies finally usurp both Samsung and Apple as kings of the smartphone space.

"Xiaomi, Lenovo, and Huawei are all aiming for a strong third place in worldwide smartphone rankings. TCL, another upstart player, is also growing rapidly as it has moved to increase its smartphone sales with carriers in emerging markets," adds Lu.

When prompted for a comment, all featured Chinese device players similarly share how they are very optimistic about upcoming prospects for their respective products and services.

"The future belongs to brands that understand their consumers and believe in the power of innovation. That is what we believe in - and, truly, such thought processes will be instrumental for the greater good of the smartphone industry too," Tong quips.

For Khoo, he is confident that Lenovo will see only more growths. "The outlook for our business can only go up as factors such as urbanisation and increased consumption will continue to help expand the market. That means we will see more of the same growths for our PC Plus lines (tablets too!) and smartphone segments," he says.

Even Wong feels the Chinese manufacturers will revolutionise the smart devices sector as he notes how: "We at Meizu are extremely enthusiastic about our performance for 2015."

Will the Chinese really bring about the fall of Samsung and Apple? It's hard to tell as no one really knows. What is clear though is how 2015 is set to bring very interesting times for the next 12 months. PC

SHOWDOWN

CLASH OF CHINESE KINGS

The latest flagship smartphones from the Mainland trash it out

by matthew yap

Though the term 'China brand' used to be associated with derision - and it still does to an extent - things are drastically different these days. Yes, Android fans worldwide have salivated at the Samsung GALAXY series. Even Apple fans fervently wish to see improved iPhones as it remains a popular choices among many with markets like Japan, Korea, and even China widely using it. However, behind the scenes within the factories in China, the Chinese manufacturers continued to adopt and adapt. This led to the mass production of their own devices.

Malaysians aren't really strangers to Chinese brands as Huawei has been in our local market for a few years and is a pretty prominent brand even if it only recently moved into the consumer space. That all changed in 2014 when a couple of new brands entered into the Malaysian market.

These Chinese brands, originally selling their products only in China for years, have decided to expand last year. Starting with Xiaomi's meteoric rise in popularity after the appointment of Hugo Barra as Vice President of International, Malaysians are suddenly made aware of the fact that they can buy flagship quality smartphones for phenomenally affordable prices.

Some may ask: "How can these brands sell at such prices and are they any good?"

Well, Team PC.com has collected some answers from a couple of those leading brands, which you can read in the February PC.com cover story this month. However, this Showdown brings attention to the stars of this article - the OPPO N3, Meizu MX 4, Lenovo Vibe Z2 Pro, and Huawei Ascend Mate 7 (in no particular order). That's right, these Chinese Dragons will be facing each other in a titanic clash of the year. Of course, opinions shared here are subjective as user mileage may vary. Thus, it is recommended to use this epic face-off as a frame of reference.

Beyond an overview of each smartphone, the Showdown will focus on the following aspects: design, features, and user experience. Now, let's get to it.

OPPO N3

The Oppo brand properly began life in 2004, making consumer products like Blu-ray players or portable media players. But in 2008, the Dongguan-based company decided to venture into mobile phone manufacturing. Wanting to stand out in a market full of iPhone look-alikes, OPPO came up with the N1 and now its successor - the OPPO N3 - is here for this month's showdown.

DESIGN
The N3's dimension makes it the largest (though not the widest) and heaviest phone of the lot. It's decked out all in white for a clean look and features a polycarbonate and an aluminium alloy body. There's a bit of flex when you press on the middle of the back cover. However, beyond that the build quality is excellent. The fingerprint sensor/button and OPPO's shiny logo is also on the back, while the fancy rotating camera occupies the top part of the phone. This time around the lens is motorised, an interesting idea that makes the OPPO N series more unique.

PERFORMANCE
The OPPO N3 scored high on the benchmarks, especially for GPU-related tests. There are not a lot of games now that can trouble the Snapdragon 801 chip and the Adreno 330 GPU, to be honest - so that is to be expected. One thing to note is that the built-in video player is pretty poor so it is best to ditch it for any favourites. In this case, the MX Player sufficed as it played 10bit 1080p videos without a hitch.

Of course, the camera is the N3's selling point. It performs well in natural light, pushing sharper than average images and natural colour rendering. Videos are alright though nothing to write home about. It's a shame that 4K video recording isn't available.

USER EXPERIENCE
Though physically a large phone, the screen is only 5.5in, making it easy for one-hand use. The fingerprint sensor is awesome too as it allows more than just for unlocking the phone quickly, but also to restrict the use of selected apps. Battery life is only average but it did charge back up from approximately 30% to 98% in about 20 minutes thanks to OPPO's VOCC charger. Fast!

For added value, the O-Click Bluetooth remote is once again included. While it does provide some frustration at first, as the battery was a pain to insert, it pairs up with the N3 in a jiffy. This accessory is not just for taking pictures remotely as it can be used to configure the phone to play a tune if it is misplaced.

MEIZU MX4

Meizu is a brand I've known of since my college days in 2006. Back then, the brand focused on developing MP3 players and they had some of the best in the market. Today, Meizu makes smartphones and has sent to PC.com its flagship MX4 for the February showdown. Now this is exciting as the brand's expertise in audio, combined with the Sharp/JDI-made IPS LED screen and the 20MP camera it uses, is set to take the Meizu MX4 very far.

DESIGN

At a glance, the Meizu MX4 might seem a little plain in design. However, its build is of top quality thanks to the high-tech aircraft aluminium frame. Those who saw it have commented on how it looks like the iPhone. On the back is the 20.7MP camera, using a Sony IMX220 EXMOR RS lens with dual-LED flash for superb snapshots. Interestingly, the cover is removable providing a familiar access mode for the SIM card slot. Display wise, the MX4 uses a 5.36in screen that punches out excellent brightness levels and contrast. Clarity is near awesome even when under sunlight.

PERFORMANCE

While it scored the highest benchmarks for processing, indicating the Octa-Core MT6595 providing some level of oomph to run the show, the GPU benchmarks and battery tests tell a different story. It still performs well but the PowerVR G6200 GPU isn't the best around. The good news is that the numbers don't indicate any incapability and it didn't stop me from enjoying stutter free 1080p videos or engaging my favourite Android games. The only disappointment here is the average battery life.

As for the camera, it offers six different modes that can be switched with ease. However, the image processing seems to be sub-par and despite the highly-rated Sony lens, there is a noticeable amount of noise still.

USER EXPERIENCE

There's a slight learning curve for beginners using the MX4, due to the lack of the capacitive back and properties/settings buttons. Flyme OS gets around this by applying a back button in every app. The lack of default widgets and the settings menu are unusual, but users will get used to it eventually.

As expected, the MX4 has amazing audio quality with a very balanced sound signature. For those who consider audio quality as very important for smartphones, they will certainly find true pleasure in listening to their favourite tracks on the MX4.

LENOVO VIBE Z2 PRO

Lenovo is not really a stranger to the premium flagship space with the first Vibe Z appearing in December 2013. But it hadn't been till the Chinese brand introduced the Vibe X that it really started making waves. So when the company heard that PC.com has planned to do a comparison of Chinese flagship smartphones available in Malaysia, the people at Lenovo kindly sent us the new Lenovo Vibe Z2 Pro for the show and tell.

DESIGN
Now this is one classy smartphone, sporting a polycarbonate frame that has a sweet brushed aluminium with a metal weave design. Looking at the 16MP rear-camera, there's high hopes for it being a high performer, especially since it comes armed with an Optical Image Stabilisation system, advanced autofocusing, and dual-LED flash. Next on the right side is the dual-SIM tray, the second of which is for non-3G SIMs. To keep the elegant look of the device, Lenovo opted to leave the speaker grill at the bottom.

PERFORMANCE
Like most Chinese smartphones, the Vibe UI used on the Vibe Z2 Pro doesn't have an app drawer. If you prefer a stock Android experience, you can switch to it by using the Developer Mode. Performance on this device is stupendous, as it can handle anything with ease. There were no instances of slow downs or lag, proving that it can perform well.

The biggest performance win for this device is the QHD screen as it displays sharp images, great contrast, and superb colours. Thanks to the screen, and its surprisingly good sound quality, videos, games, or streaming are great on this device.

USER EXPERIENCE
In general, the Vibe Z2 Pro is a pleasure to use. Though initially there had been a heat issue, where prolonged sessions of games or video would make the device uncomfortably hot, a firmware update fixed that. However, while that isn't a problem anymore, the 6in is huge enough to make it difficult for one-handed use.

The camera is very extensive and once I got used to the controls, I found it to be a capable shooter. Its interface is designed like a particular Finnish-branded camera app, to be honest. Of course, this is not necessarily a bad thing as it performs well. Last point to note is that since the Vibe Z2 Pro is pushing more pixels, battery life suffers as a result. It still lasted me through a day of medium usage, so it's not that big a deal most of the time.

HUAWEI ASCEND MATE 7

Huawei made great strides in 2014 as it moved beyond its regular network related business. In fact, it has released some truly praiseworthy smartphones. From this corner of the ring is the Mate 7 - Huawei's entry for this fight.

DESIGN

At 7.9mm, the Mate 7 is the second slimmest of the four contenders. Adding a premium feel is the aluminium back, fingerprint sensor, and the overall aesthetically pleasing design that is used. Resting below the sensor is the rear camera, with the LED flash next to it. Capping the whole look and feel is the speaker grill near the bottom left, power/volume rocker buttons that sit on right side, as well as the dual-SIM and microSD tray that resides on the left.

PERFORMANCE

Videos, YouTube streams, and gaming are great on this device's 6in screen. It may not be QHD but there are many who won't be able to see any marked difference in visual performance, so it might not really matter for them. However, graphic intensive games do cause the device to get a little warm. After running benchmarks, I noticed that the GPU scores aren't as high as expected. It may mean the GPU clockspeed is being throttled down to control the heat.

Out of the four entrants, this smartphone did best in the battery life department. Its large battery certainly helps, though I believe the power saving mode does play a role. Altogether, the Mate 7 can last a solid day of semi-intensive use - normal for most users - without the need to juice it up.

USER EXPERIENCE

The fingerprint scanner on the Mate 7 is the most noteworthy feature here. The way it's built into the device makes it so easy to use. In fact, using it is hyper convenient as it allows for bypass inserting PINs in a seamless manner. The sensor also can be used to snap off quick shots in the camera app or to lock certain things from public access such as private album and even apps.

As for the Huawei One-hand UI concept - it is initially interesting though it quickly became cumbersome. The actual experience is far from ideal since the keys became harder to press with my thumbs. In addition, the Mate 7's keyboard layout is somewhat off. Personally, I think it might have been easier and more intuitive for Huawei to stick to the Google default keyboard.

COMPARISON - SPECS

	Huawei Ascend Mate 7	Lenovo Vibe Z2 Pro	Meizu MX 4	OPPO N3
Price	RM1,799	RM2,299	RM1,299	RM1,099
Dimensions	157 x 81 x 7.9mm	156 x 81.3 x 7.7mm	144 x 75.2 x 8.9mm	161.2 x 77 x 9.9mm
Weight	185g	179g	147g	192g
Chipset	HiSilicon Kirin 925	Snapdragon 801	MediaTek MT6595	Snapdragon 801
CPU	Quad-Core 1.8 GHz Cortex-A15 + Quad-core 1.3 GHz Cortex-A7	Quad-Core 2.5 GHz Krait 400	Quad-Core 2.2 GHz Cortex-A17 + Quad-core 1.7 GHz Cortex-A7	Quad-Core 2.3 GHz Krait 400
GPU	Mali-T628 MP4	Adreno 330	PowerVR G6200 MP4	Adreno 330
RAM	2GB	3GB	2GB	2GB
Storage	16GB, expandable by microSD	32GB	16GB	32GB, expandable by microSD
Display	IPS LCD, 6in, 1080 x 1920 pixels	IPS LCD, 6in, 1440 x 2560 pixels	IPS LCD, 5.36in, 1152 x 1920 pixels	IPS LCD, 5.5in, 1080 x 1920 pixels
Camera	13MP rear-facing (Autofocus and LED flash), 5MP front-facing	16MP rear-facing (OIS, autofocus, and dual-LED flash), 5MP front-facing	20.7MP rear-facing (Autofocus and dual-LED dual tone flash), 2MP front-facing	16MP rotating camera (Autofocus and dual-LED flash)
Battery	4100mAh	4000mAh	3100mAh	3000mAh
OS	Emotion UI 3.0	Vibe 2.0	Flyme 4.0	Color OS 2.0

COMPARISON - BENCHMARKS

	Huawei Ascend Mate 7	Lenovo Vibe Z2 Pro	Meizu MX 4	Oppo N3
3DMark Ice Storm (Unlimited)	14173	16832	17233	17637
Antutu	43066	43040	50903	42325
Basemark X (High Quality)	6307	12544	8015	10233
Anomaly 2 (High Quality)	394394	568285	253196	965763
GFXBench Manhattan	535 (8.6 fps)	426.4 (6.9 fps)	447 (7.2 fps)	622.3 (10 fps)
GFXBench Manhattan (1080p)	502 (8.1 fps)	705 (11 fps)	471.8 (7.6 fps)	609.7 (9.8 fps)
GFXBench T-Rex	972 (17.4 fps)	1095 (20 fps)	1060 (19.0 fps)	1310 (23 fps)
GFXBench T-Rex 1080p Offscreen	923 (16.5 fps)	1523 (27 fps)	1097 (20.0 fps)	1283 (23 fps)

WINNER

LENOVO VIBE Z2 PRO

The truth is, all four smartphones perform well even if the scores seem to suggest otherwise. In real life, the differences aren't really noticeable. But since a winner has to be chosen, the honour falls onto the Lenovo Vibe Z2 Pro. Beautifully crafted and elegant, this good looking smartphone excels in nearly every area. Firstly, the all-rounded device has a feature-packed camera that is great for casual photography. Then there's the audio quality and high-resolution 6in screen that's absolutely incredible for movies and games. If anyone is out shopping for a good tablet and don't mind the price tag, you can't go wrong with this device.

BEST PHOTO-SNAPPER

OPPO N3

Almost predictably, the Oppo N3 is given this title. The HDR is a little 'overzealous' in certain conditions but it's got a wealth of feature that semi-pros might like, such as shooting in RAW or using the super macro mode.

BEST BATTERY LIFE

HUAWEI ASCEND MATE 7

The Mate 7 is right at the top for battery life. It's got a 4100mAh battery pack for capacity and comes with a battery saving mode that works well. There are no problems in getting a day and a half's use out of a full charge and that's saying something considering the screen size.

BEST SOUND PERFORMANCE

MEIZU MX4

The Meizu MX4 is hands down the best portable jukebox anyone can get. For just RM1,299 (32GB), users will get a media player/smartphone that will play nearly all formats that is thrown at it. Plus it has enough power to run the latest apps and enriched HD entertainment. Get a good pair of earphones or headphones for it and it's all good!

Advanced E-Commerce Security Measures

New protective methods are now necessary

by john ellis, enterprise security director, apj, akamai technologies

In June 2014, Google published a study that found that 43% of Malaysians who had never shopped online before expect to start doing so in the next 12 months. The same report also found that almost half of the Malaysian population are concerned about the security of their financial information online. This is the greatest barrier for wider adoption of e-commerce in Malaysia and throughout the world.

In its 2014 Identity Fraud Study, Javelin Strategy & Research reported that, for 2013, 13.1 million victims in the US have their personal information being taken through multiple security compromises - one victim for every two and a half seconds. This led to US$18 billion being stolen in that year.

While the report focuses on the States, Malaysia can also expect to face a proportional number of incidents as local online spending rises. As it is, there is a proliferation of domestic e-commerce stores appearing, not all of which will be as secure as they need to be.

A major route of online fraud is through card-not-present (CNP) transactions, where the cardholder cannot present the physical card for the merchant's inspection at the time of purchase. Already, merchants utilise many methods to reduce the risk of CNP fraud, like verifying the cardholder's billing address and the card security value (CSV) - the non-embossed 3-digit numeric code on the back of the credit card - with the information on file at the issuing bank. Merchants can also flag suspicious transactions, such as multiple credit cards used to pay for orders being shipped to a single address, for further scrutiny.

PROGRESSIVE REPUTATION

There are other tools that exist, such as 3D Secure, an initiative from Visa and later adopted by MasterCard, to improve the security of credit card transactions via the addition of an authentication step. However, it has been reported that both MasterCard and Visa are considering to discontinue their use of 3D Secure.

From a cybersecurity standpoint, CNP fraud can be further reduced through the use of client reputation technology. The concept behind this idea is to provide insight into the trustworthiness of a connecting client from its past observed behaviours.

Here's an example: for a week, a programmed client had been tagged as being part of an attacking effort for one random e-commerce site, then - two days later - it participated in a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack against a bank, and after that it got involved in scamming an online retailer. Today, it visits, for the first time, a website of a major e-commerce retailer - would they

want to trust this client in making an online purchase?

Understanding a client's reputation is achieved by observing, categorising, and recording its good and bad behaviour with websites on the Internet. If that client is responsible for sending spam, spreading viruses, conducting fraud, or other anti-social activities - then it earns a negative reputation.

ENHANCED TRACKING

To ensure proper reputation markers are used, Akamai's client reputation service utilises heuristics that identify attack patterns, behaviour that deviates from 'normal' activities, and drive up activities that are aimed at reducing false positives.

Through observation of persistency, distribution, severity of attacks, and other associated factors of a client, a maliciousness level can be established.

When augmented with geo-location data to identify traffic from global fraud hotspots, merchants can make better informed decisions about protecting their businesses and reduce fraud by declining any purchases that originate from clients with a poor reputation.

In using the Akamai Intelligent Platform - a worldwide distributed Cloud Computing system that gathers real-time information about Internet traffic, congestion, and trouble spots - organisations can also identify if traffic from a specific IP address is legitimate or malicious. This is determined by confirming whether the requests being made are from a human being or a machine.

If the volume of requests, even if they are directed to different websites, coming from a single IP is too high to be from a human user, then the targeted port can be flagged for further scrutiny or even be

blocked. This helps to reduce a merchant's exposure to machine-based attacks.

Certainly, there are no fullproof techniques to prevent credit card fraud in e-commerce. However, there is much that merchants can do to protect themselves from the predation of thieves. Two key action items online retailers can take notes on: review all transactions based on a well-defined and up-to-date list of anti-fraud rules as well as striving to detect fraudulent activities in real-time.

These can be best achieved through close collaboration with credit card issuers and cybersecurity companies that can leverage global data and comprehensive analytics so as to quickly mitigate such threats to merchants.

If done right, merchants, regulators, security and service providers can make the online marketplace a safer place for both businesses and consumers. PC

BACKUP

The Key to Improve Back-ups

It has to go beyond the basics

by kumar mitra, general manager, data backup & recovery, asia-pacific and japan, dell software

Despite continued technological advancements, back-up processes remain an enigma for organisations of all sizes, in all verticals. It's no secret that companies are producing more data than ever before - a growing trend that has now spread across an ever-expanding range of data types and locations. It has become so expansive that more and more information are being classified as mission critical.

Now factor in the high cost of downtime as well as the internal users and external customers who expect related apps and services to be made available and accessible 24/7. What would you get? The short answer: a world that is stuck in the unending race of knowing that simply backing-up everything just isn't enough.

Traditional strategies are incapable of meeting the needs of modern businesses. This is due to the fact that back-up hasn't evolved with the rest of ICT industry.

Too often, IT departments are simply responsible for making a separate copy - once a day - of all the organisation's data. Indeed, there is very little focus on how quickly and efficiently lost data can be recovered. Based on recent conversations with prospective customers, most companies are still using yesterday's backup strategy.

This presents a really big challenge for the storage and data industry.

APP OWNERS NEED FAST RECOVERY

The needs of the systems and services of today are very different from those the past. This huge disparity has created an equally as extensive disconnect between what IT back-up administrators do to carry out their work, what is expected of them, and the expectations of app owners.

As soon as Exchange goes down, two things occur: everyone will know instantaneously and, suddenly, the Exchange Admin has a sense of immediate urgency that a traditional back-up strategy often doesn't mitigate. This gulf between app owners and what they're held to, which usually is in contrast with what IT is responsible for, has a massive impact on the organisation.

This divisive situation is usually addressed in one of two ways, and neither is desirable. In some cases, the owners go around the back-up team and implement their own recovery solutions. This silo-based approach results in multiple copies of data, creating new challenges of having to run, manage, and administer multiple different tools. With an estimated 60% of today's huge data growth coming from copied data, most companies end up rarely knowing which version of their data is the most current.

The alternative scenario sees the app owner agreeing and allowing IT to

dictate the back-up strategy. When that happens, the company usually ends up compromising its ability to quickly restore proper operations in the event of an outage.

HIGH COST OF COMPLACENCY

The biggest enemy that these changes now face is complacency. Back-up is very much the ICT equivalent of insurance. You'd rather not bother with it and it's much easier to renew last year's insurance - or backup product license, than spend the energy coming up with a better approach.

This line of thought is yesterday's thinking and it doesn't add any value in this age of efficiency. When you use a value-add recovery solution, you create business resiliency. The extra value comes from being able to use the data in a variety of ways because you can back it up within its given context. Thus, you can open it up, use it, and work with it by using real live data.

FIVE STEPS TO CHANGE

In the digital age, it is now an imperative for organisations to modernise their back-up strategies and truly add value to the business. That means they should stop at 'just' backing up their data and, instead, focus on delivering true business resiliency.

That means turning back-up into a proactive activity that delivers extra value and enables businesses to use their data in

a variety of different ways. Below are a set of best practices that can be used to better achieve this transformation:

- **First things are still first**
  Make sure you have broad app coverage. One thing you can't do when modernising the process is to forget the basics of backing up. With the rapid proliferation of new apps throughout the data centre, you need to make sure your organisation has the right tools and strategies in place to cover everything you need to protect.
- **Consider a tiered recovery strategy**
  You need to define and assign which systems are mission critical and

business critical. Only then do you choose the appropriate back-up technology for each one. Also engage apps that have short Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and are highly visible.

- **Now move beyond just doing back-up**
  Data alone has no context without the apps that made it. Thus, you also need to back-up the tools that provide a full image view. This means using systems that can take a snapshot of the data and the app so that when you restore it, you have the context of where it came from.
- **Merge replication and back-up into one**
  If you're still thinking of the two processes as separate, non-integrated tasks, then you're stuck in the past. You need to be able to move data where you need it and when you need it. To do that, you will need control over efficient and complex replication tasks.
- **Make sure you are Cloud aware**
  The advent and use of more Cloud apps means you need tools that are capable of incorporating those programmes. Yesterday's world backs up everything within IT control but Cloud apps aren't controlled by IT. You want something that enables Cloud engagement and understands it. Having done so can protect your data in the same way you protect on-premises apps. [PC]

Scalable Energy Efficient I/O
Chip-to-Chip Interconnect Solution
for High Performance Computing

Big Data Goes
All Green

Energy efficiencies are key for Big Data

Prakash Mallya, Country Manager of Intel Malaysia and Singapore

I've recently made the effort to be more environmentally friendly. I started cycling to work instead of driving, I turn the TV off at the mains when I've finished watching it, and I've stopped letting the tap run when I brush my teeth. Did you know that you can save up to eight gallons of water a day by doing that?

We're constantly asked by governments and utility companies to be more energy efficient in our day-to-day lives - so I wanted to do my bit. I hope you are too.

There's no hiding from the fact that we all need to be more energy efficient to reduce harmful carbon emissions and to satisfy growing demand for energy from the ever-increasing global population. Take

Asia Pacific for instance. Between 2010 and 2035, energy demand is set to increase by 67%, accounting for more than half the world's energy consumption.

This wouldn't be such a problem if all the resources needed to generate power are renewable. Unfortunately, coal, oil and gas - the main resources used for energy production - are running out, and when they're gone, well that's that.

It's an unsustainable situation. This is why change is needed. The small changes we make to the way we consume energy is easing the pressure and is something we should continue to do. Of course, there's a game changer coming that is set to revolutionize the way we use and generate energy.

BIG DATA, BIG INSIGHTS

Across the globe, power grids are being modernised and made smarter by a host of new technologies, such as sensors, metering solutions, and home energy management systems. Most of these innovations are powered by Intel chips - creating a variety of data sets that deliver deeper insights into the infrastructure's performance.

These 'smart grids' will be generating unprecedented amounts of data - relating to energy production all the way to consumption - and connecting with various devices and systems to empower all involved and enhance their overall energy efficiencies.

If you're scratching your head and wondering how all this data these smart grids generate is going to deliver improved energy efficiency while enhancing the service you receive from your provider - then let me explain.

First and foremost, Big Data insights on energy consumption and generation allow utilities to effectively and efficiently manage the power grid in near-real time. What this means is that utilities have a detailed overview of the volume of energy flowing through the entire power grid and can be scaled up or down accordingly at any time to meet demand. This allows us to better manage and use our precious resources as well as enable utilities to identify faulty parts of the network so that they can isolate them and mitigate the impact such faults have on the rest of the power grid.

Let me give you an example. Through analysing data about ad breaks for popular TV shows or national sporting events, utility companies can anticipate windows where huge power surges will occur when viewers rush to switch the kettle on or grab a glass of water, placing significant pressure on the network.

As such, the volume of power in the grid or water in those specific supply lines can be managed accordingly to satisfy demand while ensuring the processes are deployed in a more efficient manner.

The use of renewable energy in the power grid is also a great piece of evidence of how data analysis is enabling us to be greener. For instance, being able to predict how much power is generated by solar power and comparing this with usage data, utilities can identify how much energy needs to be generated from non-renewable sources and therefore, reduce wastage and better manage the primary pipelines.

Having improved understandings on how we use energy will also empower utilities to offer consumers tailored tariffs that are suited to our individual needs, is able to deliver more accurate bills, and incentivise us to be more energy efficient.

For instance, to ease the pressure placed on the power grid during peak hours, energy providers can offer reduced rates during off-peak hours to encourage usage then. This not only increases energy efficiency but also improves overall customer service.

To investigate the hugely positive impact Big Data can have on energy efficiency, Intel set up Pecan Street Inc, a non-profit consortium of universities, technology companies, and utility providers that collaborate on testing, piloting, and commercialising smart grid technologies. Since its launch two years ago, we've gathered over 80GB of data from sensor systems in just over 200 households in the Mueller community of Austin, Texas.

Through the insight gleaned, we aim to drive new products, services, and economic opportunities that help you to easily and efficiently manage energy consumption while making your homes more comfortable to live in.

Of course, it's critical we all still make the little changes - like turning the tap off when brushing your teeth - but it's encouraging to know that in Big Data we have a tool that will help us enhance energy efficiency further so as to ensure the environmental well-being of our children and future generations. [PC]

BIZ 2.0

Cloudy Forecast

Disruptive times ahead

by victor yap

When it comes to the ICT industry, many things tend to be affected by the multiple trends occurring and the constant changes that take place in this ever-volatile marketspace where brands come and go within days. Most view these developments as progress that is very important as it spurs innovation amongst them.

Some have resorted to tagging the word - disruption - to this never-ending scenario of change. In the case of vendors, this term is used in a very positive light as it drives up their rate of deployment and engages active augmentations of current technologies that are now in use.

The latest disruptions to 'threaten' the status quo is, of course, the Cloud, Big Data, and Mobility. According to Bryan Che, General Manager, Cloud Product Strategy, Red Hat Inc, any development that the ICT industry encounters will be a huge challenge for those within. While this is an on-going thing, the touch revolution that is now occurring has a turn-out that many did not expect.

"With touch-capable devices, the ballgame has changed completely. As consumers are quick to adopt, organisations have to comply as well. Question is: what is required and for how long? What if businesses don't adapt? Well, if they don't seriously consider moving onto the Cloud or employ Big Data, they'd most certainly will not be ahead of the curve when it comes to ICT innovation. In fact, they'd lose out on the changes of experience at all levels," Che adds.

To be nimble, it is only a matter of engaging the right strategies and understanding how this on-going disruption work in a positive manner. For Che, it is about ensuring easy usage for the ecosystem as well as nurturing integration and innovation. For the former, businesses have to re-work processes to be seamless and quick in deployment, while the latter sees new concepts that merge new platforms with current systems.

"As it is, organisations are now accepting that the current evolving trends - Cloud, virtualisation, and Big Data - are here to stay. Hence, the understanding that IT departments are no longer solely depended on for implementation and managing services. Instead, their role have evolved with the technology they deal with as well as they are seen as the ones that broker access and deployment for businesses. This plays up the ease of use and nurturing that Che alludes to and ties in to addressing the demands of providing speedier processes," adds Damien Wong, Senior Director and General Manager, ASEAN, Red Hat Asia Pacific.
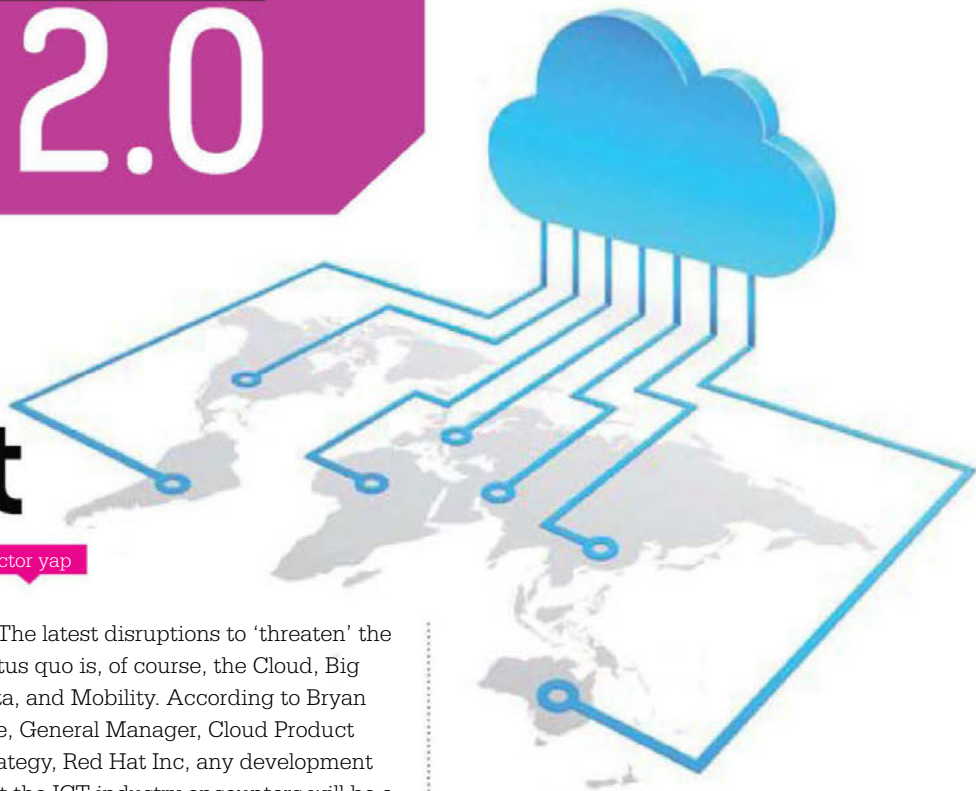
Cradling the Future

New partners in funding ventures

by sia zhen ning

Finding someone to invest in your start-up company can be really hard. To counter this growing negative trend, early stage ecosystem influencer, Cradle Fund Sdn Bhd, an entity that clearly understands the scenario all too well, is looking to throw start-ups a helpful bone as it has partnered with four other companies to create a co-investing agenda.

Cradle's four new partners are Fatfish Ventures Sdn Bdh, OSK Ventures International Bhd, CoEnt Venture Partners Pte Ltd, and Crystal Horse Investments Pte Ltd. These signed partners will take part in a one-to-one equity co-investment exercise, investing up to RM500,000 each to fund Malaysian technology based start-ups.

Alongside the investment, Cradle will also be taking equity in the companies invested, which is a first for the Government-linked agency. This agreement is collectively worth RM11.5mil

(From left) Patrick Yee, Executive Director and CEO, OSK Ventures International Bhd; Nazrin; Dato' Sallehuddin Othman, Chairman, Cradle; Kelvin Goh, Venture Partner, Crystal Horse Investment Pte Ltd; and Lau Kin Wai, Chief CEO Fatfish Ventures Sdn Bhd, have come together to support the entrepreneur ecosystem.

and is the largest co-investment agreement Cradle has signed thus far. In comparison, the agreement with Golden Gate Ventures Pte Ltd last June had been worth RM2.5mil.

"We are very elated to bring four new partners on-board this collaborative venture. This co-investment partnership takes our relationship with each other to a whole new level. Being seasoned investors, our new partners will also give us additional insights and shared experiences with investments in start-ups that Cradle may not currently have," says Nazrin Hassan, Chief Executive Officer of Cradle.

All four are keen to see what they can do with their joint investment funds and programmes for 2015 as they are now looking for recently established and new platforms to invest in.

"This is one way Cradle can continue supporting highly talented technology entrepreneurs realise their dreams for success," he adds. **PC**

Digital Education for All
E-Learning is critical for the masses

by victor yap

Self-paced learning. Cloud-based lessons. eLearning. Inclusive experiences. These and many more aspects of the new Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013 - 2025 are the primary focuses of regulators. This rings true for the Multimedia Development Corporation (MDeC) as one of its primary roles for 2015 is to rollout e-learning processes.

"We're in the best position to put things together as we have the ICT background, funding experience, and deep understanding of digital education. The new and unexplored possibilities and independent learning potential the concept offers through the improved personalisation processes ensures the ones being educated will benefit the most," says Sumita Nair, Director, Youth Division, MDeC.

This is something that online education advocators have long propagated without MDeC's direct support. However, with the new Education Masterplan, these upstarts can now legitimately engage regulators like MDeC to streamline their efforts in ramping up the digital learning trend.

"What we have done on our own is nothing short of astounding as the response from many sectors about the work we do has been nothing but positives. With MDeC, we can really take the next step forward in educating students with the digital tools we have developed," notes Edmond Yap, Co-Founder of EduNation.

According to Sumita, this is just the first of many MDeC initiatives as it is looking to engage similar platforms to optimise the push for digital learning. **PC**
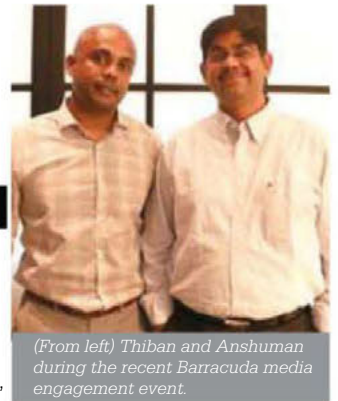

Tougher Security
New improved measures required

Burgeoning ICT trends will always have its issues. For Cloud Computing, mobility, and Big Data, it is data protection, information management, and the seamless integration of all three.

(From left) Thiban and Anshuman during the recent Barracuda media engagement event.

For Anshuman Singh, Group Product Manager and Top In-House Researcher for Barracuda Networks (Global), 2015 will face a spill-over from 2014 in terms of opportunities and challenges. The former will see more businesses consider the move to the Cloud and the value of Big Data, while the latter consist of new attack vectors borne from the latest threats that are expected to appear as part of the evolution of the ICT industry.

"From advance Denial of Service activities to social media type phishing and better, attack methods will experience some level of change as companies begin to make the transition to the Cloud and consider improved mobility," Anshuman notes.

Besides needing to address these evolving threats, organisations also have to be wary of their impact towards operations as well. According to Thiban Darmalingam, Regional Manager, Barracuda Malaysia, the wide-ranging effect means organisations now have to do more within their ever shrinking implementation budget. **PC**

The Cloud Gambit

EMC places its chips on Hybrid Cloud

by sia zhen ning

What is the uptake of Cloud technology in Malaysia? That is the question EMC Malaysia tries to address recently as it reveals the findings of a Hybrid Cloud survey that it had conducted in partnership with IDG Connect.

According to the survey, all of the organisations that took part used more than one form of Cloud services in their organisations, with 59% utilising off-premise public Cloud services, 51% deploying on-premise private Cloud, and 42% working with an on/off-premise system that hosts single tenanted private Cloud solutions.

Aside from compiling the higher Cloud system uptake statistics, the survey also introduces pressing concerns of businesses when they want to transition towards using the public Cloud. Issues like trust and security, data protection, and their availability are some of the major barriers that many encounter when adopting public and Hybrid Cloud infrastructure.

To smooth over the jump onto the Cloud, EMC has planned to share its Enterprise Hybrid Cloud Solution - a system that it has built with both Microsoft and OpenStack technology options. Set to roll-out in 2015, it will also introduce professional and educational services to help customers implement and manage the EMC Enterprise Hybrid Cloud Solution within their ICT environment seamlessly.

"Cloud Computing is no longer new to businesses as over 80% have already deployed onto the Cloud and rolled out improved governance policies.

What matters now is finding the right solution that tailors to each business' individual needs. We believe Hybrid Cloud has excellent potential among Malaysian businesses because it incorporates the speed and agility of the public Cloud, yet offer the control and security measures that private Cloud is known for. These fundamentals essentially meet Malaysian businesses' core objectives of needing flexible yet secure and speedy infrastructure and services," says Cheam Tat Inn, Managing Director of EMC Malaysia.
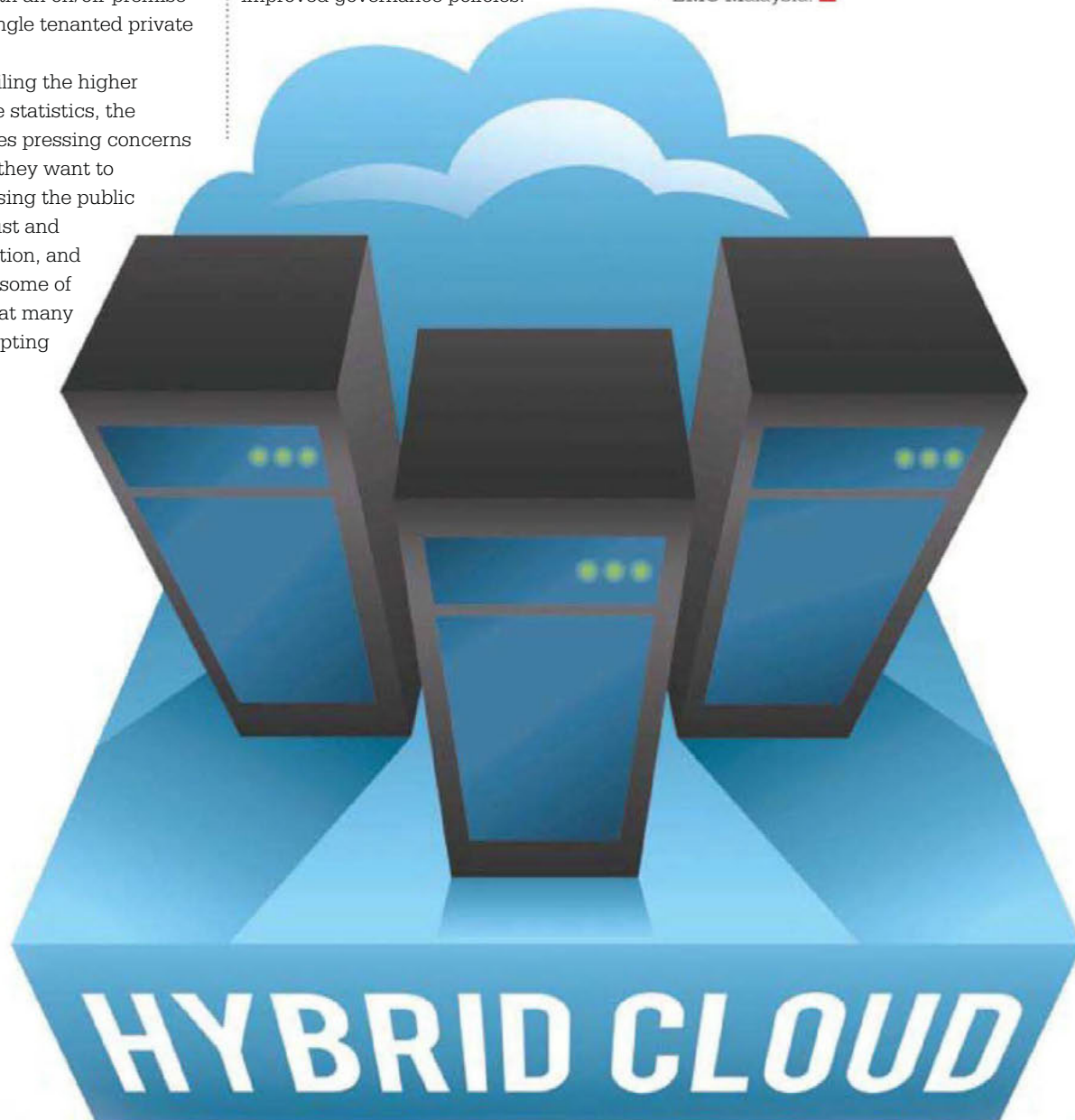
HYBRID CLOUD

State of Hybrid Cloud
in Malaysia

CLOUD COMPUTING: CURRENT USE

59% OFF-PREMISE, PUBLIC CLOUD SERVICES

51% ON-PREMISE, PRIVATE CLOUD SOLUTIONS

42% OFF-PREMISE, HOSTED SINGLE TENANTED PRIVATE CLOUD SOLUTIONS

CLOUD ADOPTION OBJECTIVES

87% FLEXIBILITY

83% SECURITY & GOVERNANCE

71% SPEED

TOP 3 BARRIERS TO PUBLIC CLOUD COMPUTING

38% Security, data protection & availability

18% Data & application portability

11% Complexities related to integration of existing on-premise IT infrastructure with cloud platforms

TOP 3 BARRIERS TO HYBRID CLOUD COMPUTING

24% Trust & security

23% Cost of integrating legacy on-premise systems with hybrid cloud infrastructure

16% Application management overheads

WORKLOADS IN PUBLIC AND HYBRID CLOUD

72% EMAIL

60% WEBSITES & WEBSITE APPLICATIONS
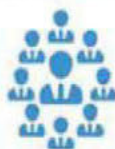
56% ERP HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT

80% OF COMPANIES IN MALAYSIA **HAVE IMPLEMENTED CLOUD COMPUTING AND GOVERNANCE POLICIES**

The survey has been conducted with 100 C-level executives in Malaysia in October 2014.

EMC²

Last-Minute Help for Holiday Shoppers

Great tips for safe holiday shopping

Many are still in the holiday mood as Malaysia moved from the New Year to the upcoming Chinese New year. Some online shops are even offering to deliver presents for the continued festivities. We don't blame you if you want to avoid crowded shopping malls and shop from the browser window, just remember to stay safe and secure!

That is why for all of us last-minute shoppers, our online security guru, Raphael Labaca Castro, has prepared his nine 'online shopping tips'.

1. Ensure your computer is set up for safe shopping

Just like you wouldn't drive a car that wasn't road-safe, you shouldn't shop on a computer that isn't fit for online shopping. Get it ship-shape by updating your operating system, Web browser, and any other software you can. Also install a security solution. The patches will close known vulnerabilities and the antivirus software will prevent online threats trying to steal your data.

2. Only buy from trusted sites

Using online vendors you can trust is extremely important. Items for sale should have good descriptions and include detailed delivery information with estimated arrival dates. If you're unsure of a website's reputation, do some Google research - good Websites will have no shortage of people singing their praises online about these retail services.

3. Be secure when money is involved

When you log into a site, you should use a secure connection to prevent your details from being visible to all. Sites tend to handle this through HTTPS connections, and it's easy to spot: look for 'https' at the start of the address bar and check for the lock in use on mobile devices. This encrypts your connection and helps keep your data just between you and the shop.

4. Be careful with free offers or amazing discounts

It's not unusual for products to be discounted at busy shopping times to draw in customers at a hugely competitive time of year. However, stay cautious. Hackers could craft pop-up windows with amazing offers that are designed to look like trusted vendors. Be especially skeptical of pop-ups telling you that you've won something, especially if you've never entered a competition with them.

5. Use secured wireless connections

Not all Wi-Fi is created equal! Free wireless hotspots are significantly less secure and should be treated with suspicion at the best of times, but doubly so if you're wanting to do anything involving money: online banking or shopping. Use a secure connection only - your home or work network - where snooping cybercriminals are less likely to be listening.

6. Don't give more information than you have to

It's not unusual to have to register on websites before buying your presents, but you don't need to overshare. Generally speaking the shops will ask for more information than they need - fields marked with an asterisk (*) are usually mandatory

and can't be skipped but don't feel you need to fill in the others. If they don't confirm which are essential, trying to submit with nothing filled in will often make the website become a bit more transparent.

7. Use credit cards

Stores will often prefer you to use your debit card rather than a credit card. If you have the option, pay with a credit card. Why? Credit cards usually have protection against fraud. Keep an eye on your accounts at all times, especially in the period of your purchase and contact your bank immediately if you spot any suspicious activity.

8. Use passwords on all your devices

All your devices should be password protected. It's tempting to keep phones unlocked for convenience, but with a lot of private data on them, a thief could do a lot of damage. Pick a good password, using two or more words and a combination of numbers and letters and set your phone to lock itself after a few incorrect attempts.

9. Do backups monthly

Backing up your data is important, should you lose access to your computer through theft or infection. There's also ransomware,

where an attacker will remotely encrypt your files and demand money to decrypt them again. Frequent back-ups will mean you don't have to give in to this kind of extortion. Monthly back-ups should be sufficient for most, but if you need a more regular schedule, then don't be afraid to set one.

"Finally, enjoy the shopping season from your sofa - just make sure you do so in a secure way. Attackers know this is the busiest time: it's theirs too. So always work to stay one step ahead of them with our tips and stay vigilant!" adds Labaca Castro.
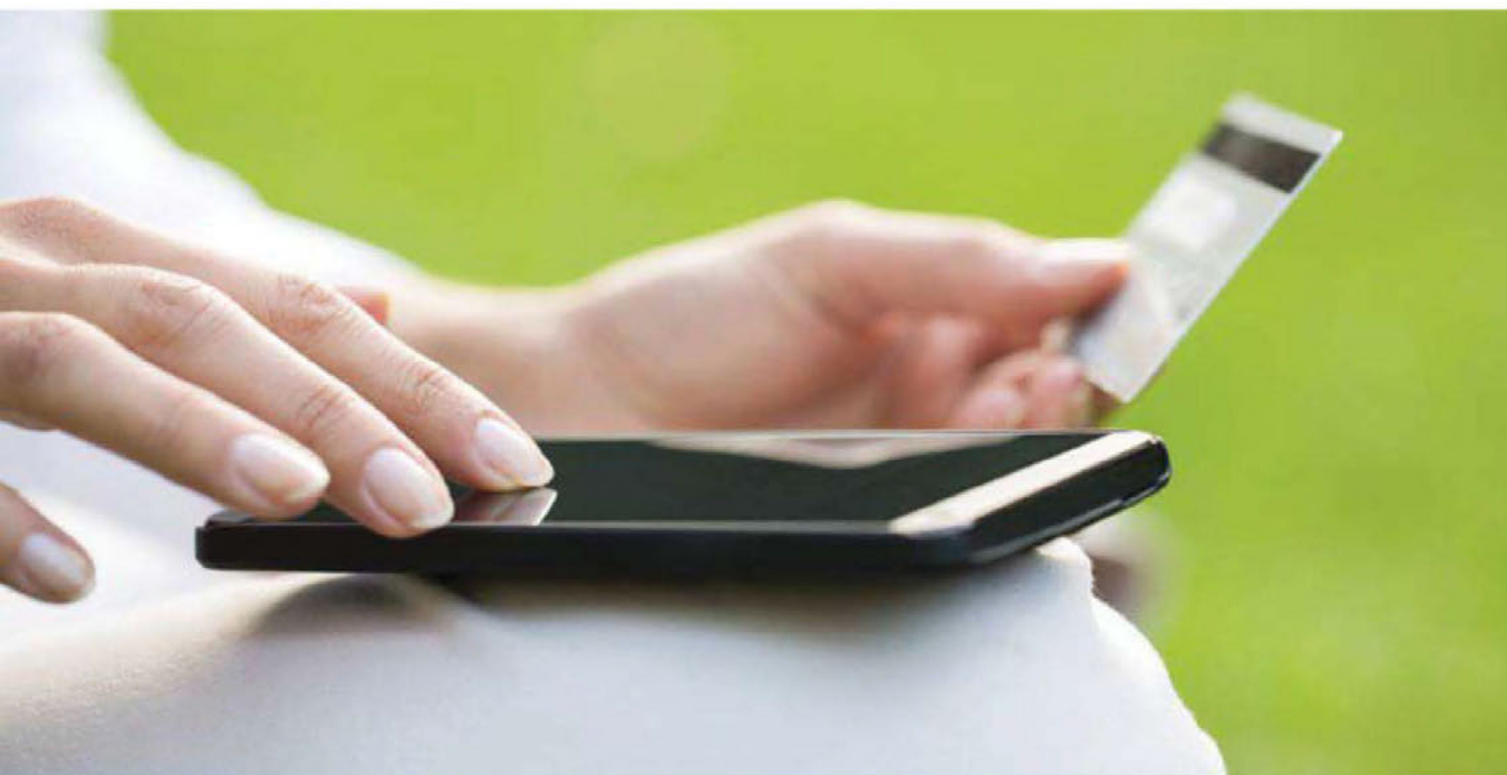
Wearable Solutions

Taking the idea beyond consumer needs

by matthew yap

Sridharan

Starting out life in Sweden, IFS Solutions now has offices and employees that are based all over the world. Locally, IFS Solutions Malaysia had been established in 1994 to provide sales, professional services, and customer support for its client base in Malaysia.

Now, the locally based IFS Solutions Malaysia main focus is to provide business application services to medium- and large enterprises within the country. As smart wearables continue to gain attention from manufacturers, IFS Solutions has begun exploring and developing all new business application solutions for its clientele, in order to provide more value using this new platform.

PC.com managed to speak with Sridharan Arumugam, Vice President of IFS for South East Asia (SEA) as he shares IFS Solutions' take on the smart wearable market and about the kind of apps that IFS intends to develop for the fledgling technology.

PC.COM: To start, could you introduce yourself, your company and what you do?

Sridharan Arumugam: IFS started off as a Swedish company founded in 1983. Today we've gone on to become an organisation with more than 79 offices in 60 countries that are located all over the world.

Globally, our key focus area is in the following industries: asset and services; project-based; manufacturing; as well as supply chain management. We began operating in Malaysia and Asia in 1994, and I look after ASEAN operations. There are more than 10 offices in Asia, with direct operations in Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore. We also work a lot with partners in countries like Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, and now we're trying to get into the inner regions of Cambodia and Myanmar as well.

Here in Malaysia, our focus lies in the oil and gas (O&G) industry. Of course, we also work with our other partners to address other sectors like manufacturing and its related sectors such as automotive, discrete manufacturing, process tools manufacturing, and capital industries. Malaysia is the hub for our operations for the SEA region where we manage and upkeep for over 50 consultants to support our regional customers.

PC.COM: What is the reason that made your company decide to go into smart wearable apps? It sounds like this is a little different from what you would usually do.

Sridharan: At IFS we believe in innovation. I consider IFS as a market leader when it comes to providing the latest technology to customers, especially to business users. With social media now becoming a norm, not only in our private lives but also for our business operations, the next step would be about how we can bring these technologies to business users and enable them for mass use. We believe that this is our task in providing business solutions.

We explore and use our IFS labs to test out new technologies and innovations. To be relevant in today's market, we have to move fast to improve ourselves. According to one of Gartner's reports, by next year (2016) the wearable market will hit 10 billion dollars. Even at this year's CES, so many new wearable ideas have been showcased. Among them are the many innovative wearables.

Of course, there had been a lot of talk about consumer technology like 4K imaging and virtual reality. However, I believe just as many are trying to bring wearables into our daily lives. So at IFS, as a business solutions, we quickly move to learn how we should be in this arena as well because this is what's going to drive the market forward; we can see huge potential in wearables.

IFS has always been working on mobile technology - or rather mobility, to give our business customers augmentations in their operational processes. For them, most of their work is on site and not in the office. While you can access your company's system - be it an Intranet or hardware like your notebooks and PCs from selected locations, just as many need to get access to information when they are out and about. Without such services, they would not be able to keep up with changes. Say there's a change in information, like delivery of assets for example. When the alteration is not properly communicated on time, there will be negative consequences to the project.

But with wearables? Our labs have worked with Samsung to create a method, using Samsung's Application

Programming Interface (APIs), to deliver a message from a project management system directly to a smart wearable. The Samsung Gear 2 had been the initial model - the proof of concept we have developed together with Samsung. Now another example is for a MRT project engineer working on-site. This trial will track changes in the project's planning or in inventory arrival, and he'll have to re-schedule his activities live while on-site. Imagine if he could instantly receive notifications of these changes on his wearable; it's simple but useful information for these kind of people.

PC.com: So - out of curiosity, will such applications be based on Samsung's upcoming Tizen platform?

Sridharan: Our apps have been tested on the Samsung Gear 2 and is basically an API that talks to Samsung protocols to send messages. So I'd say it could if it's programmed right.

PC.com: As we all know, 2014 had been the year where wearables really came into the market. Besides what you've mentioned, could you share of any other developments IFS has done for smart wearables in 2014?

Sridharan: Even our collaboration with Samsung is just a proof of concept. What we do normally is put it to our early adopters - customers who want to try it out. Therefore, this proof of concept gets some real leg work by some of clients like those who operate in Europe. After we know that our usual customers are happy with the solution, we release it to the market. While what we have isn't the final product yet, it can be considered as our entry point into the wearable market. As it is, our team will spend more on wearables, looking into things like Augmented Reality. Again, people on site can use this technology - view data at a glance and get information, like how to repair a particular machine, quickly. This is the direction for IFS Solutions in regards to wearables.

PC.com: You shared about CES earlier as well and that there were many different types of products announced. Is IFS building any solutions for other technological areas like the Internet of Things (IoT)?

Sridharan: Not really, because IoT is still more of a consumer market idea. At IFS, we want to focus on business solutions. That means trends like Bring Your Own Device (BYOB) - the current 'big thing' that many are still looking at.

For example: I'm heading to Singapore today and once I arrive I'll be receiving a lot of purchase requisitions (PR). While my data could be at my office here or in Thailand, I can still do all my work through my phone because I can access the company's systems through it. We are very much into business driven applications; tablets, mobility, and related services that can provide all kinds of access.

In the case of wearables, they will receive information only vital for specific uses. For the former, it's useful for cases like when I'm on business trips since the KL office won't have to wait for me to return to approve any PR. Imagine how much waiting time I've reduced and, thus, it proves how this is relevant. So most of our efforts is in increasing productivity by offering mobile solutions; mobility is the key, with wearable being a new element of it.

Sridharan: One of the problems for BYOB is that opening up your corporate network to your employee's devices is seen as risky. Many companies hesitate because of this as security issues cannot be ignored.

What if the employee's phone falls into someone else's hands? They can then connect to the corporate server to steal or alter information. However, take that issue away and I think Malaysia is ready to embrace this new platform.

The second issue is awareness of wearable technology in increasing your productivity. "Will it really?" some might ask. My company is a case study they can use. When I'm away, I don't expect my office to stand still. They still have to work and I still have to approve certain things, hence they have to move on. If they wait for me to return… I'm sure you can imagine the backlog I'd face. So how we address this is by education. When we implement new systems for our clients, it starts off as the traditional client-server implementation - staff can only access a system from their office. Once we believe that the client is ready, we guide them towards implementing mobility. Wearables are not far off from that point onwards.

To sum it up for you again, the reasons are security and awareness - the two most important things to address first.
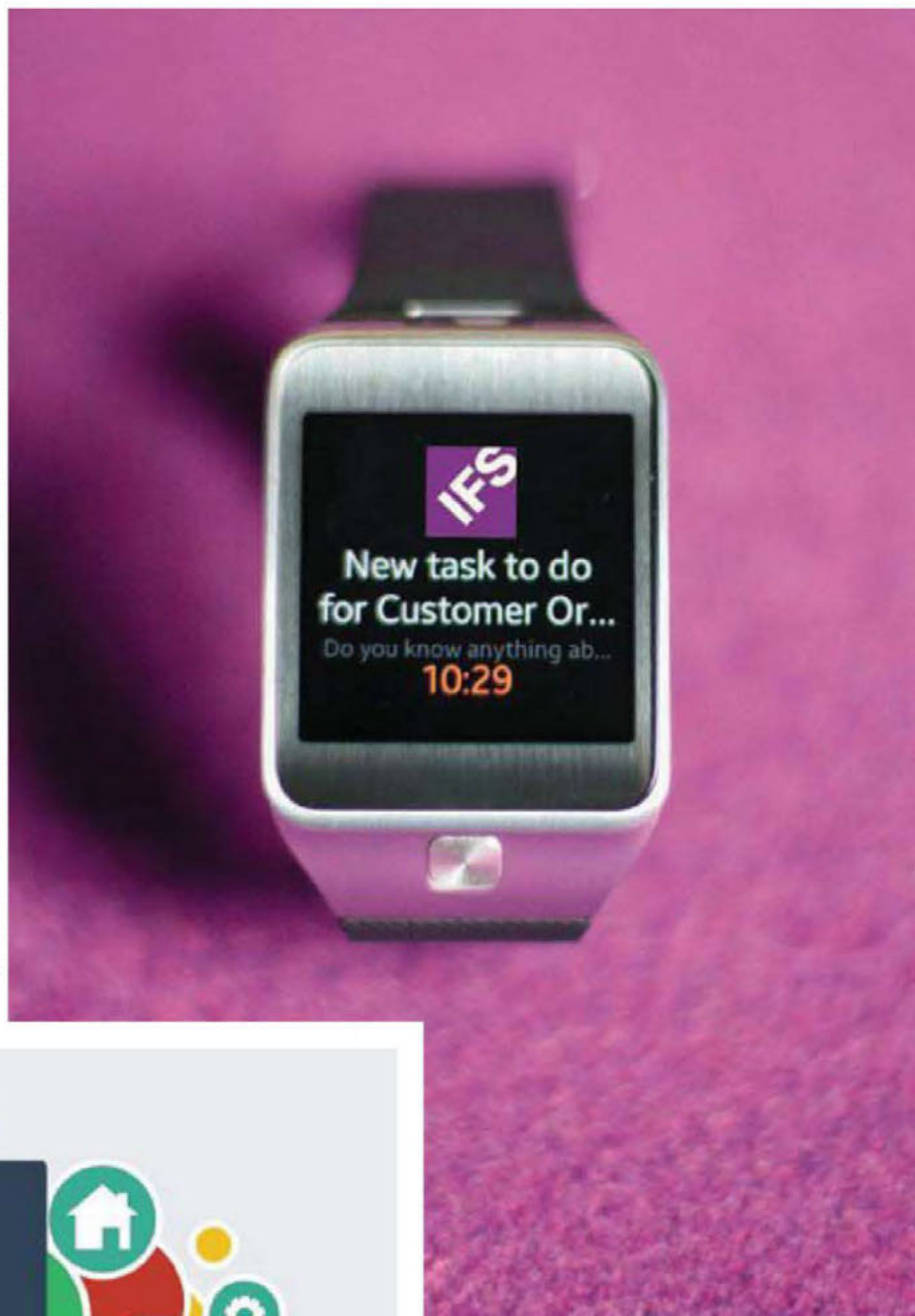
Sridharan: Consumers will be waiting for the latest gadgets since they are ready. However, for businesses, it's still going to be slow for a while more. Spending will still be there even with the oil crisis and our weak currency. This is why I don't expect a slowdown for consumers. That would mean some controlled spending performance on the business side as well.

Sridharan: We'll be focusing on getting our prototypes out on the market first, but the focus may expand into other different types of gadgets. You know we've started out on the smartwatch and I've shared the potential of us looking into AR equipment. Things like smartbands that monitor your temperature and can give you warnings in hot climates is an idea I've read about, and these are applications we can innovate on. We want to look into how we can bring these to business or operational users, plus the gadgets we apply them on may change like the wristband to AR glasses, a pendant or even clothing.

Sridharan: With globalisation, one day you might just find your new competitor is from Taiwan. As for our clients, how they can get an edge is to improve efficiencies on business operations. We've been helping companies worldwide to be efficient by improving their productivity via the adoption of integrated ERP business systems. Companies should invest in a comprehensive business system, whether it is a small one or not, that gives them full control of their business processes and have transparency. The system will give them enough information to make decisions and I believe that wearables can one day play an important role in all this.

Globally, our key focus area is in the following industries: asset and services; project-based; manufacturing; as well as supply chain management.

(From left) Hara, Tadakoro, Imai, Ohashi, and Numakura on stage during the AFA2014 I Love Anisong Live.

True Idol
Representation

IDOLM@STER across generations

by victor yap

visuals by: anime festival asia

concert pictures by: anime festival asia / hajime kamiiisaka

(From left) Hara, Tadakoro, Imai, Ohashi, and Numakura pulling off a gunshot during the exclusive media engagement.

When Bandai Namco Games first released the first version of IDOLM@STER, a videogame that focuses on training, raising, and producing successful idols, many wondered if it would ever become a hit. Featuring nine idol trainees to choose from, which moved up to 12 when the series progressed, the game opened up the eyes of many to the trials and tribulations of what makes or breaks an idol group and its production house.

An equal representation of the IDOLM@STER team, a nice mix of the three current teams, had been recently invited to perform at last year's Anime Festival Asia. The members - three from the original team (Asami Imai, Manami Numakura, and Yumi Hara, voicing Chihaya Kisaragi, Hibiki Ganaha, and Takane Shijou respectively), one member from Million Live (Azusa Tadakoro voicing Shizuka Mogami) and one other representing Cinderella Girls (Ayaka Ohashi voicing Uzuki Shimamura), had been delightfully surprised and left in awe to the thundering applause and support from the sold out concert venue. This is irrefutable proof for the girls and their managers that there is a humongous demand for the IDOLM@STER brand outside of Japan.

PC.com managed to secure an interview with the five to learn how they have grown with the brand and their response to the overwhelmingly positive yet maddening support that they have received from overseas fans.

PC.COM : Being an idol on stage and a voice actor are similar yet distinctively different. How do the two roles differ?

Yumi Hara: As a voice actor, I only had to focus on playing my role well with my voice. It's a very centralised role that requires me to act out my character. However, as an idol, I have a strong play image to manage and maintain. Having to do both is a very strange feeling for me as I need to take on many different aspects of my character onto the stage. It's a challenge I am more than game to take on.

Ayaka Ohashi: Personally, I never thought I'd stand on stage as an idol. It's very surreal as I imagine myself facing the crowded audience standing with the character I voice, Uzuki-chan, and think about how she'd act on stage.

PC.COM : Who among you is the most senior? Do you feel any pressure for being one of the few the juniors will look up to?

Asami Imai: Of the five present here, I can safely say I am the most senior. That means this question is directed at…well, me! For clarity sake, I'm the only one out of the members here that has been a part of the IDOLM@STER project from the very beginning. Manami-san and Yumi-san have joined the original team along the way after the initial release.

IDOLM@STER, on its own, has a lot of potential as there will always be young and talented members who want to become an idol that climb through the ranks to join us on stage. In reference to the earlier question, I can say that when I'm on stage, I could really feel the heat and excitement of the work I do and the performance I pull-off on a live show.

This feeling is always there for me when I perform with members from my batch and those from the upcoming generations as well. Obviously, we have to work harder as we are the seniors and have to set the precedence of not 'losing' to the juniors.

PC.COM : What does 'being an idol' mean to you?

Azusa Tadakoro: Since I'm taking this question and I'm all about being positive - the answer is pretty obvious: being an idol means making others happy and giving energy to everyone!

(The other members on the panel agree, adding that an idol's role is about creating positive vibes for their fans and audience.)

PC.COM : Let's be more specific here - what does it really mean to be an IDOLM@STER?

Imai: Oh, this I have to address (laughs!). Hold on, let me calm myself. For me, and I speak for all of us really, it's a way of life. In Japanese, the word *jinsei* (literally translates as 'my life') best describes that! A life as an IDOLM@STER is one that I cannot never truly escape from (laughs!)!

PC.COM : Wow…just wow! So how do you relate to your role in the IDOLM@STER series?

Imai: Since I have been reminded of my role as the most senior here, I'd like to exercise my right to select the panel member to answer (laughs!). So please, Manami-san you're up!

Manami Numakara: Well, for a very long time I've been told I look and act in a mature manner. As for the character I voiced, Hibiki Ganaha, it is easy to tell that she's a bright and lively girl whose specialty is to make others feel energetic too. At first I didn't resemble her at all. However, I've come to learn that Hibiki has similar traits with me - like being good at knitting. That made me realise how we are not so completely different eventhough we literally represent the opposite sides of a coin. Over time, the producers made sure we both share common traits and likes.

Because of that, while Hibiki is in no way similar to me, she does feels like my sister or someone I can get along very well with.

: While we're on the topic of character role depiction, this question is for Hara-san - seeing as how you are naturally a bubbly person, what sort of challenges do you face voicing Takane Shijou?

Hara: Well, that's a tough one (smiles!) Everyone, myself included, knows how Takane-san is this being whose very existence is deemed as perfect. She's very beautiful and exceptionally talented. If I had to compare, then I'm not even close to where Takane is as a performer. Therefore, I always strive to become more like her and make sure I improve myself all the time so that, one day, I can reach the level of perfection that she is at.

: IDOLM@STER has been around for nine years. Have there been any unforgettable incidents?

Imai: Having been a part of this project from the very beginning, I can say I have several. I'll put this on record for this interview - no one knew at the time but during the first and a half to second year of recording, I went to an arcade centre in Tokyo where the experimental version of the game has been introduced privately. I had to try the game for myself and it gave me a better understanding of what

I am a part of. Yes, you can say I'm a Producer-san as well to an extent. I really love playing the trial game. When it finally launched, I came across many Producers playing the game and it dawned on me as "Oh! Proper Producers are playing the game!" That, for me, is very memorable. It's something I can never forget.

: This is for Ohashi-san as the question is focused on the IDOLM@STER - Cinderella Girls -. Did you ever imagine if Project Cinderella would turn out to be such a huge success?

Ohashi: We got to this point of success only because everyone at Namco Bandai Games, especially those that worked on the game, the senior team, the Producers - both new and current, are very supportive of Cinderella Girls. Thanks to everyone's hardwork and passion, we performed together with the Million Live and the Original teams at The IDOLM@STER M@STERS of IDOL WORLD! 2014. Now there is even an anime production too and we've also reached the third anniversary for Project Cinderella.

To have come so far - it's all so positively overwhelming. I'm very, very touched by what I've experienced and am very

happy to be a part of such a successful and huge production.

(At this point, Ohashi started tearing up and needed a short break to recover.)
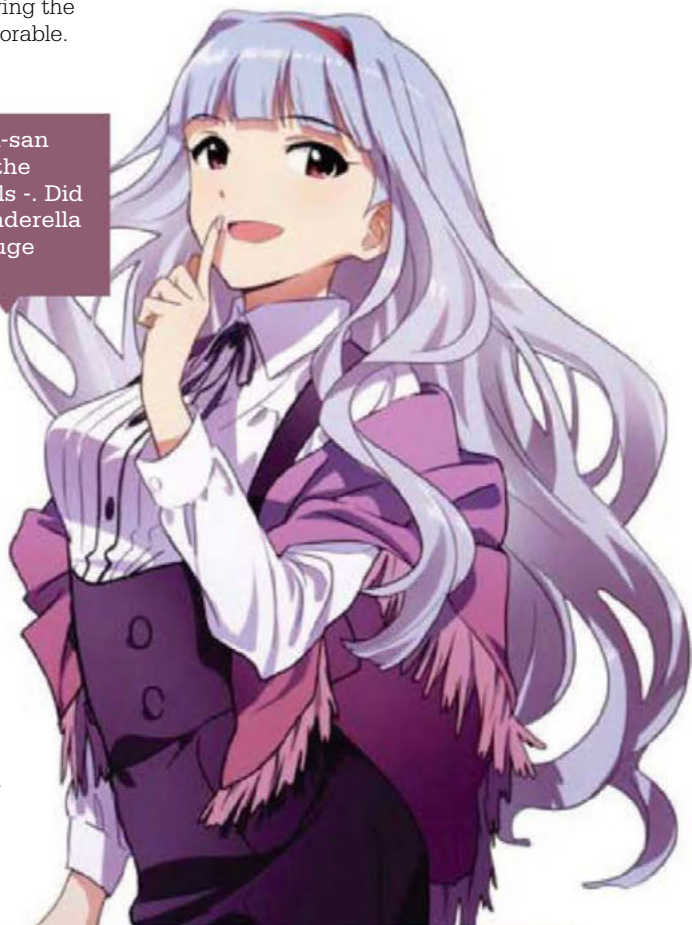
Imai

Ohashi

Tadakoro

PC.COM : Before we wrap up, could each of you do a shout-out for your fans in this region?

Hara: It's so amazing to see how far we've come. Thank you so much for your unending support and all your sharing efforts of IDOLM@STER all over the world.

Ohashi: All your support and love for IDOLM@STER has encouraged us to do our best at all times. I will continue to do so with Uzuki as well and do what I can to reach out to new Producers as well.

Imai: At the recent Cinderella Girls live show in Japan, I believe I spotted many foreign Producers who came to support the event. Since many have been travelling over to Tokyo to see us, I'd want to return the favour, if there is any opportunity, and go see them personally to thank them. If there are any lives that are organised outside Japan and we're invited, I'll do my best to go!

Tadakoro: When IDOLM@STER Million Live first came out, I'd never imagined that we get so much support outside of Japan. While we're nowhere as popular as the seniors, we are getting there and I can say with confidence that the Million Live team will definitely support future Anisong events outside of Japan if given the chance. I'm so very touched. Thank you so much for all your support!

Numakura: As this is my first time being at an overseas event, I've encountered so many new experiences and made a lot of wonderful memories. While the team cannot make it this year, I am sure they can feel all your love back home. We will come back again to this region if given the chance, so please wait for us! **PC**

Numakura

Hara

New Assists in Inbox

by tim sohm, software engineer, google asia

Extra help for reminders
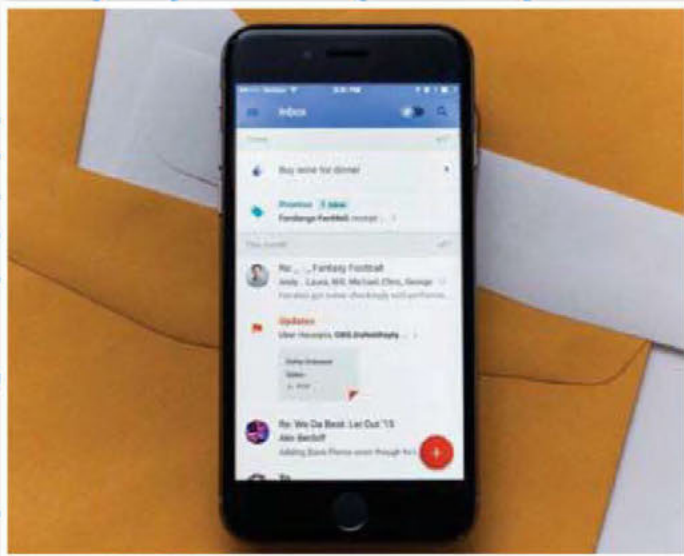
D uring the busy holidays, who can say no to a little extra help? The new Google Inbox makes it easy to focus on your priorities by adding reminders right to the top of your inbox service. As we all know how easy it is to 'save' to-dos for later, it only makes sense that the new Google Inbox app provides over 20 different types of Assists-handy pieces of info to help you with the next step.

Below are a few ways to consider engaging this intuitive offering that the Inbox app offers. There will also be a quick look behind the scenes within this Tips and Tricks session.

To start, simply add an email address, phone number or link to a reminder.
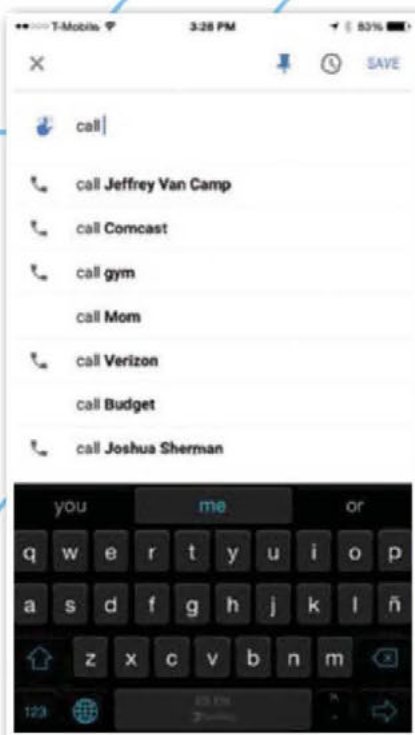
Next, you could add a reminder to pick up your friend at the airport, pack for your trip to Langkawi or watch JinnyBoyTV's latest video-clip. Assists can also provide your friend's flight status, a weather report for the island resort trip, or a link to recommended tour video.

There's a lot going on behind the scenes to make Assists work. For example, phone numbers and business hours come from Google Maps and customer support numbers from Google's Knowledge Graph. Your contacts and other emails (like flight confirmations, purchase receipts, or bill notifications) also help Inbox provide Assists.
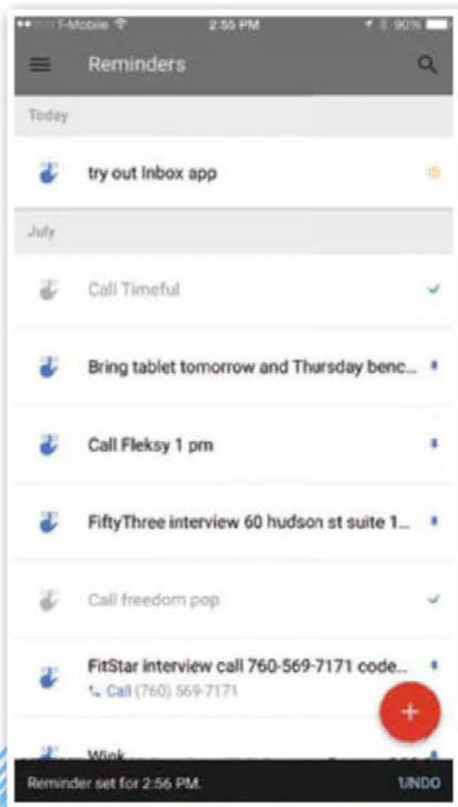
In fact, some Assists even combine information from multiple sources to give you an easy to track and read reminder. For example, when you create a reminder to return a product you purchased, the purchase date and business details from your confirmation email, the business's return policy from the Knowledge Graph, and the current date all combine to give you a countdown of how many days you have left to return your purchase.

Another category of Assists are questions that, when answered, lead to another Assist. For example, if you want to call your dentist, Inbox will ask you who your dentist is and once answered, provide a link to call them.
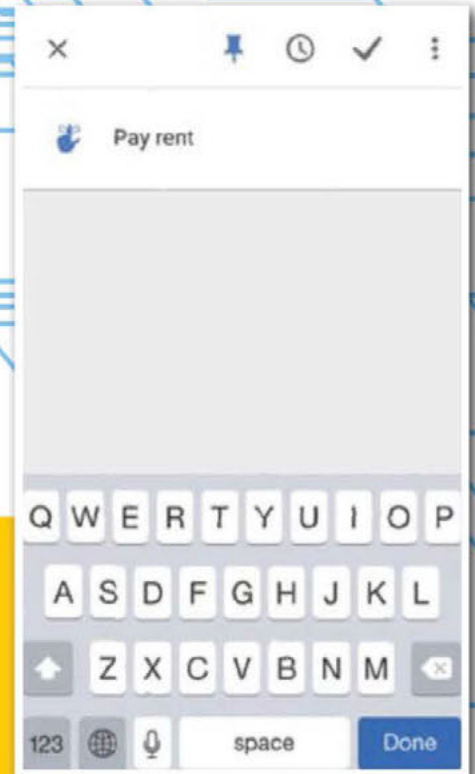
And starting in 2015, Assists will be getting even better user controls. Based on your requests, the app will be able to discover more details easily. Thusly, Assists now help you create Reminders faster by providing smart suggestions as you type (or tap!). If a suggestion has an icon next to it, this automatically means you're guaranteed an Assist.
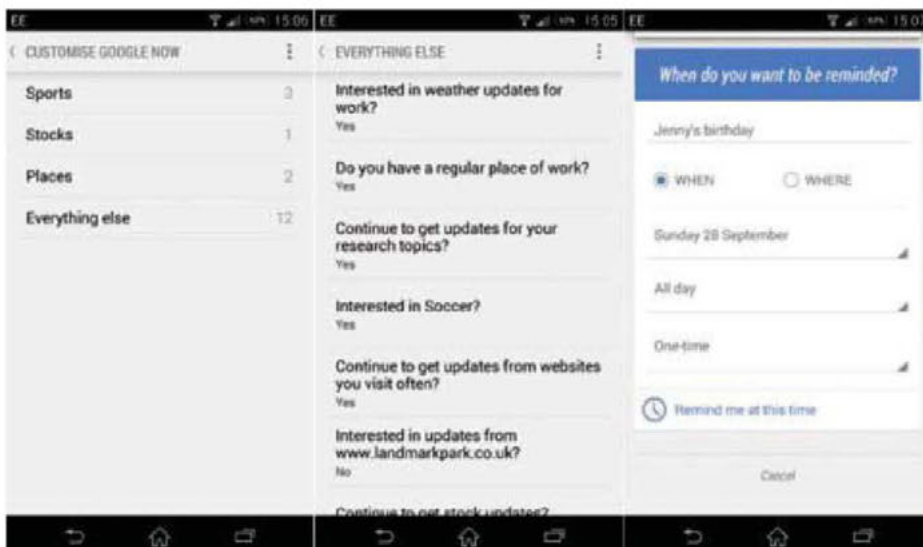
It is Google's fervent wish that Assists will save users a bit of time over the holidays - now and the ones that are looming nearby. As always, if you aren't using Inbox yet and would like an invite, email inbox@google.com and an email will be sent over to you as soon as more invites are available.

Bonus: In the spirit of saving time, Inbox on Android now works with Android Wear. You can now view messages, mark as done, and reply without taking out your phone.

CONTEST

RICOH
imagine. change.

RICOH GIVEAWAY

When it comes to printing, long-lasting quality is paramount. That means being able to produce print-runs that are not only considerably outstanding in terms of visual quality but also robust enough to withstand some elemental challenges. On top of that, the printer themselves have to be of a compact size and able to churn out jobs at a fast pace.

This is where the concepts Ricoh created come into play. Since printers these days are known for their decent print-outs, consumers are now looking at other value-adds instead. That means going into areas that would improve the overall user experience. For Ricoh, such ideas fall into realms of speedy outputs that do not compromise on quality and prints that do not smudge or resistant to liquids.

Undoubtedly, you'd have read about such features in previous reviews within the Tested pages. So now here is your chance to win a printer that offer these nifty functions as Ricoh called in to graciously announce that it wants to kickstart the year for PC.com readers by giving away four printers. All you need to do is answer the following questions:

PRIZES
2x Ricoh SP211
Black & White Laser Printer

2x Ricoh SG 3120B SFNw
GELJET Multifuntion Printer

1. What is the benefits of using GELJET ink?

_____

2. How many pages can the Ricoh SP211 laser print produce in one minute?

_____

3. Are both printers eco-friendly (Hint: check Ricoh Malaysia's website.)

_____

4. With Ricoh's new GELJET printer, I can … (less than 20 words)

_____

_____

Name: _____   IC Number: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____   Contact Number: _____

Digital Photography

PICTURE OF THE MONTH

Camera: Nikon D3X
Focal Length: 110mm
ISO: 200
Exposure: 1/1600 sec
F-Stop: f/5

Form in Darkness

All about shooting silhouettes

by victor yap

S hooting in the dark usually means low-light environments or night photography and the like. There is another photo-snapping reason as well - one that is usually not considered since it is more related to outdoor where a bright background can easily be obtained.

While some of you may have guessed it by the title alone, let's make it clear: this month's Pixels focuses on taking pictures of subjects that overlay a bright background. In short: silhouettes. The more apt descriptor would be: shadowy representations of a subject that is posing in front of a bright background.

But how does one snap such interesting pictures? Well, there are two ways to go about it!

IF INSIDE

Let's start with capturing silhouettes in an indoor environment first. All you need is a really bright background, like a window during noon time for instance, and you're all set. No, really, that is all there is to it. Why? Once you set the camera - be DSLR or a point-and-shoot, with the right configuration, everything else is pretty straightforward.

Make sure the camera is set to a low ISO rating (max ISO 800 if using strobes and wanting full shadow results) and that the aperture and shutter speed are high and fast, respectively (f/7.2 and f/22 (for full shadow), 1/25 to 1/200 (for full shadow) tops). Place the subject in front of the window and make sure to frame the subject in the middle of the window. Then snap away.

You'll immediately see pictures that show the subject being illuminated by the back. It is as if the subject had been in a flash blow-out, creating an interesting shadow image. Think of a singer being in front of a spotlight - that is the result you want.

What if you don't have a window to use? Well, there are strobes too if you have a pair to spare. All you need to do is setup one strobe to blow out the wall and another to provide ambient lighting. The former is obvious while the latter is specifically required for the express purpose of creating enough light to capture the subject yet still give it that shadow-like persona.

Camera: Sony Alpha 77 Mk II
Focal Length: 50mm
ISO: 800
Exposure: 1/320 sec
F-Stop: f/22

Camera: Canon EOS 7D
Focal Length: 75mm
ISO: 100
Exposure: 1/400 sec
F-Stop: f/6.3

FOR OUTSIDE

What if want to snap silhouettes in the great outdoors? Well, for one thing, it's easier than doing it indoors. What you need on hand is an exceptionally bright backdrop - take for instance the sunset over the beachside or a cloudy expanse on a noon day.

Again, place your subject in front of the blinding background and start shooting. Keep in mind that the camera must have the following settings - f/4 to f/14 and 1/400 to 1/4000sec. Playing in this range will create various silhouettes - from muted colours to pure shadow play effects.

Once you have the basics down to pat, it's all about being creative after that and seeing what you can do with random objects.
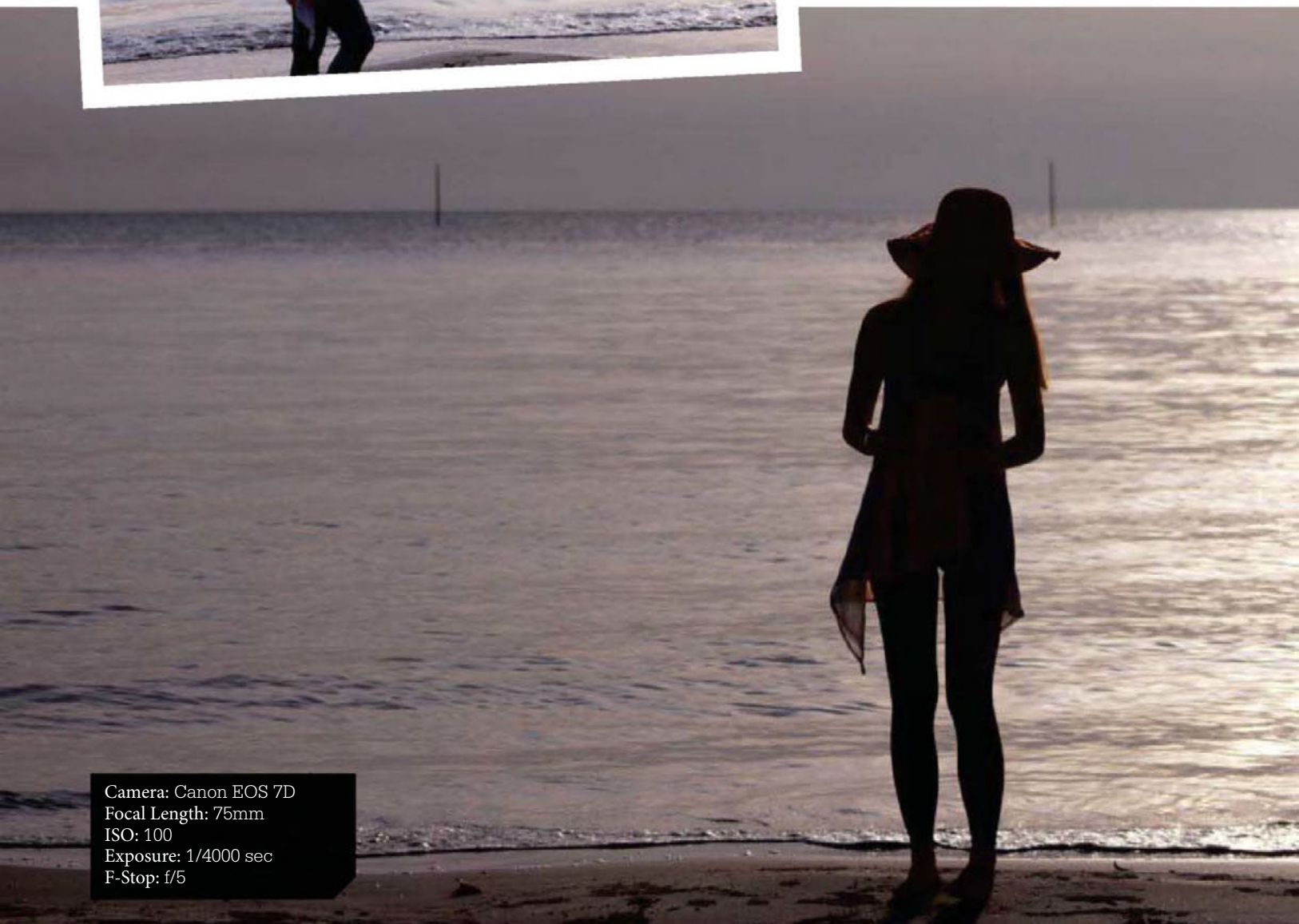
Camera: Canon EOS 7D
Focal Length: 75mm
ISO: 100
Exposure: 1/4000 sec
F-Stop: f/5

Camera: Sony Alpha 77 Mk II
Focal Length: 50mm
ISO: 800
Exposure: 1/160 sec
F-Stop: f/16

Camera: Sony Alpha 77 Mk II
Focal Length: 50mm
ISO: 800
Exposure: 1/200 sec
F-Stop: f/18

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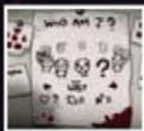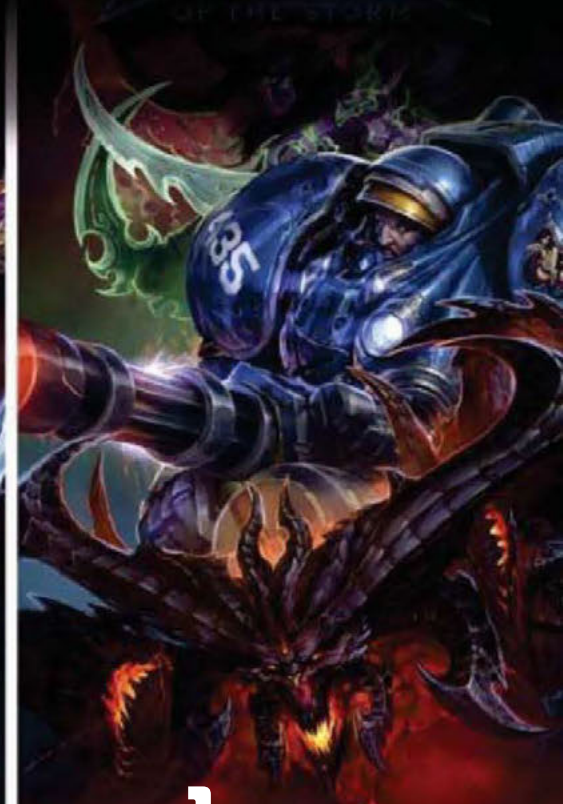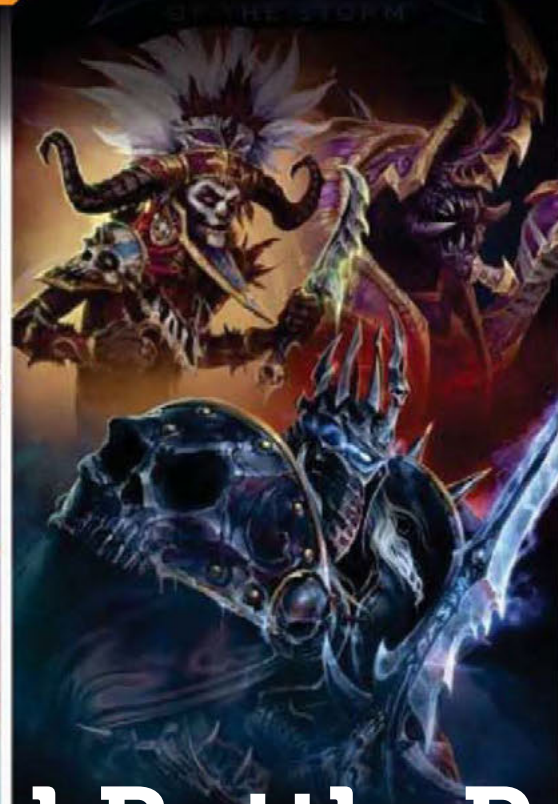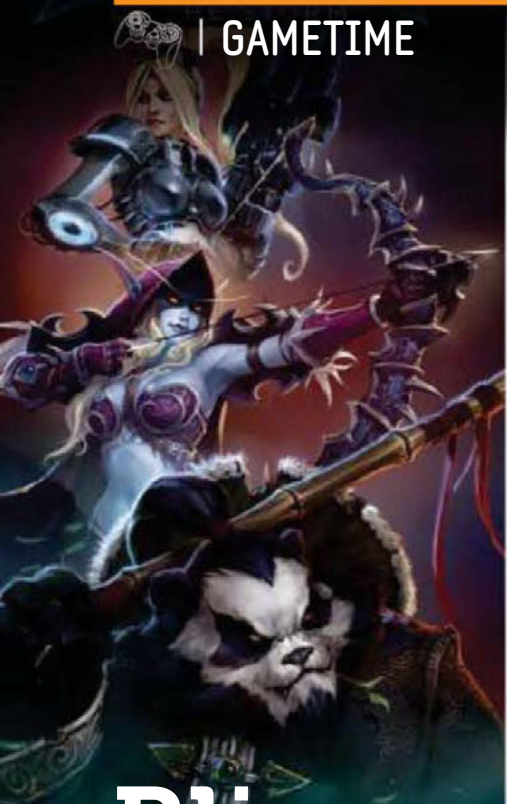
Blizzard Battle Royale

Heroes of the Storm · by matthew yap

When Blizzard first revealed 'Blizzard DotA' to the public along with StarCraft 2: Wings of Liberty, it had been more to show off the StarCraft 2 Map Editor. However, the crowd at that year's BlizzCon, which is where the concept video aired, really loved the idea. The guys behind the concept must've thought "Why not?" in response to the crowd's reaction.

After a few more BlizzCons and some franchise disputes with Valve for the name of 'DotA', Blizzard revealed that the proper name of this idea will bear the title: Heroes of the Storm (HotS). This all took place on and before 17 October 2013. In this review, I'll be giving you all a sneak peek of the game and what one can expect.

WELCOME TO THE NEXUS

When I logged in for the first time, I found an intuitive interface with most things visible at a glance. There's my 'Level' and gold reserves, a basic game menu, the chat bar, and the usual series of tabs along the bottom. Clicking on Play brings me to the 'prep' screen, where I can select from one out of five game modes, choose my hero, see who's on my party, and the usual whatnots that players now expect to see.

How about basic gameplay? It's essentially a 'Massive Online Battle Arena (MOBA), so the concept isn't all too different. Once in-game, my objectives are pretty standard: destroy the enemy's Core while combating waves of enemy minions and the opposing team of 'Heroes'. Of course, the folks at Blizzard don't want us to think of this game as a simple MOBA. Rather, they want to get us gamers to refer to their concept as a 'Hero Brawler'. This brings me to my next point: Heroes.

HI JIM, ZERATUL, AND DIAB- WHAT?

If you are new to HotS, don't be surprised by the mishmash of characters from different worlds. This game is set in The Nexus, a battle arena for Blizzard's finest Heroes (and villains) from Azeroth, Sanctuary, and the Koprolu Sector. Right now, the pool of Heroes number at 32, with three more announced at BlizzCon 2014. From that, seven are made available on rotation every week so that newbies can start playing with them immediately. Do note that if you are starting off, you can only choose from a total of five Heroes.

Do you like being the damage dealer? Pick an Assassin like Jim Raynor or Illidan.

If you like soaking up the damage on the front lines, then go with Pandaren Brewmaster Chen. There is also the Specialist class that are well… specialised, such as in taking down buildings. Me? I play Support mostly - the class that stays back to heal teammates or throw out buffs/de-buffs for the team. With the trusty Razer Blade 2013 in hand, I go forth to do battle.

HEROES, LET US DO BATTLE!

For newbies, there's an easy to follow tutorial that stars Jim Raynor in all his sarcastic humour. "Ain't nobody got time for that!" Then go ahead and try playing against the AI in either Practice or Cooperative. I gave all modes a go just to see how they worked before joining a few friends for some Versus games. My take is really straightforward and so here is the short of it: HotS is really easy to get into.

TALENT ME THIS

There's no item system here and gaming experience is shared. This might tempt some to accuse Blizzard of making a game that lacks depth. But wait…haven't most of you whined about needing strategy in games. The biggest contributor to strategy in this game is the Talents system, an

idea borrowed from World of Warcraft (WoW). Talents can alter the attributes of a Hero's skills, like increasing damage or adding special effects. As you level up during a match, you have to pick the Talents that bests suit your current game and team composition. While it's not as comprehensive as other MOBA games by any means, I'm certainly one of the many that hopes Blizzard will continue to add more new elements to the game as part of its efforts in increasing the game's depth. Of course, all this has to happen while keeping the game unique.

AHOY LANDLUBBERS, BRING ME 'MA DOUBLOONS!

In essence, HotS differentiates itself by making you complete objectives, such as collecting tributes or activating a dragon statue. These goals can be crucial to the endgame as it could swing a match in your favour. Thus, it encourages team battles as both sides scramble to secure targets for their respective teams. Currently, there are five maps in HotS, each with its own

unique objective to complete. Personally, the one I really hate is the Haunted Mines. In one game, my party got team wiped before entering the mines, so the other team managed to secure a fully powered Grave Golem as a result. The game didn't last long after that…

DAY OF QUESTS

Unlocking Heroes for permanent use is similar to League of Legends (LoL) - you farm for 'gold' to purchase the Heroes. But how do you go about that? Why, with the Daily Quests that the game offers to all players, of course.

Using another idea from WoW, HotS gives you daily quests once your account hits Level 6. By completing them, you'd get more gold. Farm up enough and you can purchase your favourite Heroes! As for me, I'm saving up 10k gold for Jaina Proudmoore. Ice ice baby!

'UNDER CONSTRUCTION, PLEASE TRY AGAIN LATER'

Since HotS (at the time of this review) is still in Technical Alpha, there are obviously some things that are not added yet, like a spectator feature. Ranked matches aren't available yet either so there's no league table system to rate you against your friends or rivals. Besides those, Blizzard

has servers only in the US, Europe and Korea, meaning us Southeast Asia-based players will be dealing with some latency; my average is - surprisingly - rated at around 30ms. You also can't chat with anyone from the opposing team. I'm not sure if this is something Blizzard will unlock eventually or if it's some measure to eliminate the trash talking and toxic behaviour that plagues LoL and DotA 2.

THE STORM BEGINS

So when are they releasing HotS? Normally, I'd say "Hey, it's Blizzard so don't hold your breath, okay?" But by the time you read this, the game will be in Closed Beta - a mode that you can opt-in to join using your Battle.net account. Perhaps, the fight in The Nexus will arrive sooner than anyone thinks.
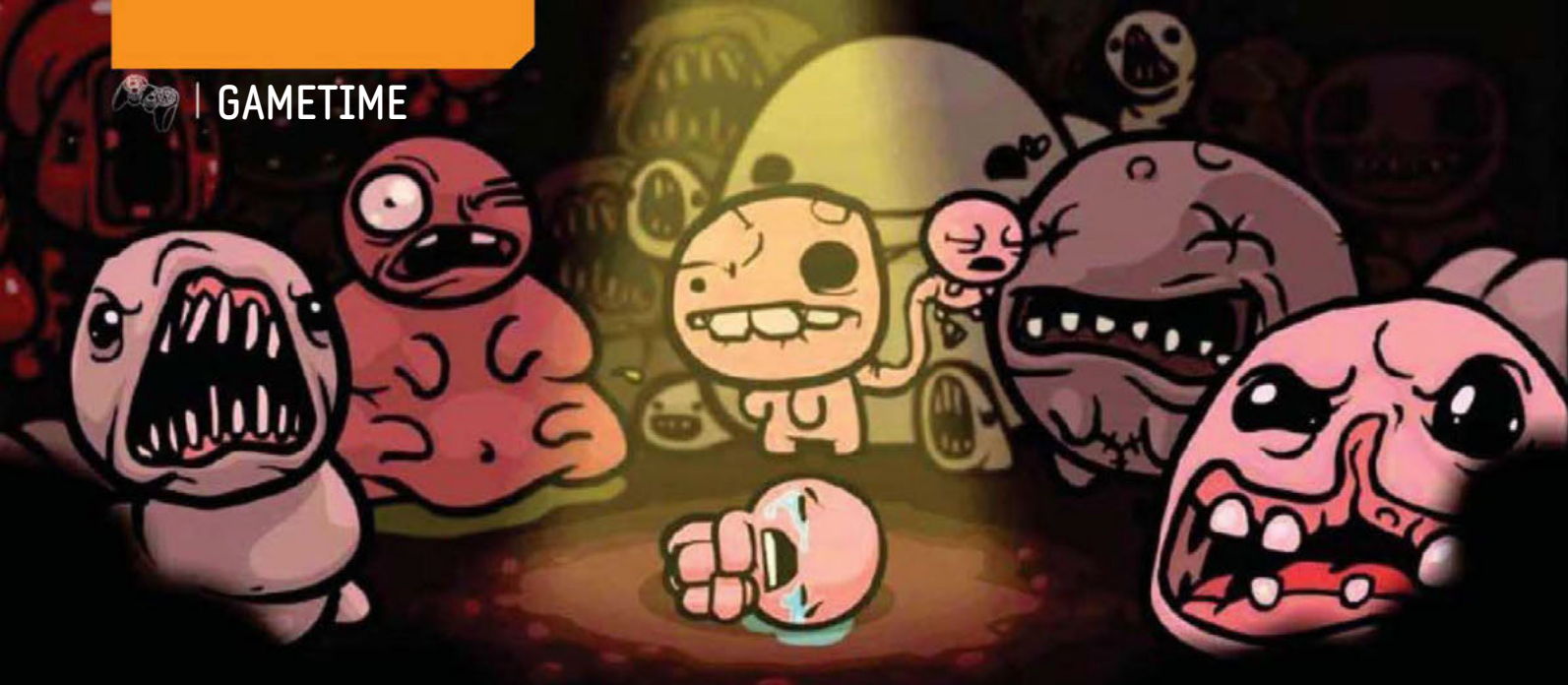
Abraham's Test of Faith

The Binding Of Isaac: Rebirth

by sia zhen ning

Once upon a time, indie game developers Edmund McMillen and Florian Himsl developed a game called The Binding of Isaac (BoI). It is literally based off the Biblical story where God tests Abraham's faith through the requirement of sacrificing his son, Isaac. The game - eventually - got so popular that fans are demanding for more. This resulted in the Wrath of the Lamb expansion, and needless to say, fans of the game are crying out for the developers to continue. Seeing a great opportunity to rebuild the game, Edmund decided to make a sequel/reboot of the original, leading to the creation of The Binding Of Isaac : Rebirth.

AN ENGINE'S IMAGE

The original BoI is truly a great game. However, there is one major hindrance for the original: it runs on Flash. The archaic animation format has caused some performance issues like slow-downs when there are projectiles, multiple enemies, and massive effects flying all over the screen. With Rebirth, McMillen finally spent some money on a proper game engine. Thus, the game now runs like a well-oiled machine. This is especially obvious when I played it on the Razer Blade 2013 platform.

Personally, this is jarring since I dumped 200 hours into the first game and have already gotten used to general sluggish performance of the original.

THE SCAPEGOAT AND THE SOMEWHAT RESURRECTED

Being a sequel to the original game, it is obvious that there will be new content thrown in. Lo and behold, McMillen hath delivered in the form of three new characters being introduced in Rebirth alongside the original seven. Of the three,

two can be found in the Bible. First up is Azazel, a demon-type character that starts off with little health but comes with flight and a miniature blood beam. Second is Lazarus, the Biblical man who comes with an extra life - a direct reference to his resurrection in the Bible. Last is Eden, a being whose appearance and starting items are randomised for every playthrough that the player starts.

There is a super-secret character that can be unlocked through a convoluted series of deaths but I'll leave you to

Developer: Nicalis
Platform: PC, Mac, Linux, PlayStation 4, PlayStation Vita
Release Date: November 4, 2014
Genre: Rogue-like Dungeon Crawler
Player(s): 1-2
Chosen Platform: PC
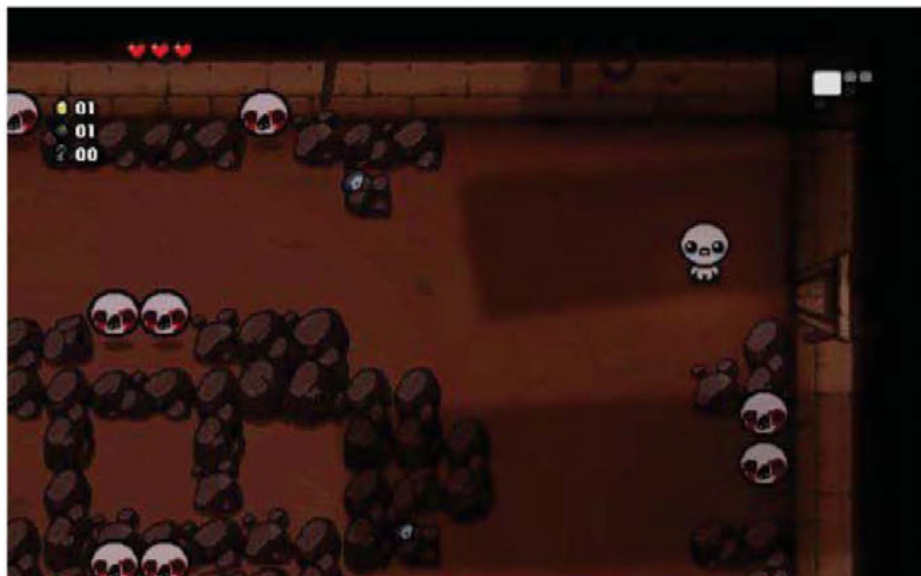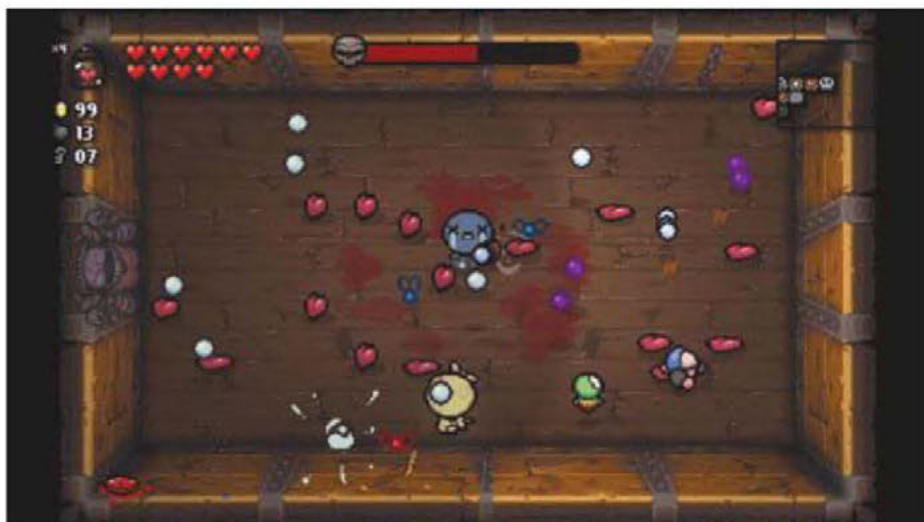
discover him on your own (or you could always Google it for *ahem* spoilers).

THE HORN OF PLENTY

What is a BoI game without a mountain-load of power-ups? In that regard, the Rebirth take has jammed in around 100 new items and trinkets for you to play around with such as new pills, additional runes, and improved heart containers. These items range from the incredibly overpowered, to the 'why did you even put this in?' junk. Most of these extra stuff have been designed to synergise with the current equipment of old.

DANTE AND VERGIL

Besides the new gear and toys, the core also had some added changes to make Rebirth better than the original. Top on that list is the introduction of the new co-op mode - where a second player can control another character and jump in on the fun. This feature is only available on a local machine however, so there is no online co-op of any form. Another upgrade is the availability of Hard Mode - a mode that causes items like keys and bombs to drop less frequently while increasing the spawn rate of champion enemies. Making a return from Wrath of the Lamb are the Challenge Levels, now with more variety as the conditions for each challenge run can range from fixed items to you not being able to shoot tears at all.

AN EXPANDED WORLD

Items and enemies aren't the only new aspects added onto Rebirth as the game is now able to support new rooms as well.

There are now more variations for the room layouts as well brand new extra-large rooms that are easily four times the size of a standard room. New concepts are also included in Rebirth, such as the Dice room that has a random effect depending on the dice face. Most importantly, two new floors are added to the game, giving it more play time that automatically boost the replayability to even newer heights!

THE LORD AND SAVIOUR OF ALL, RNGESUS

With all the new additions to Rebirth, the core game is still pretty much the same. Like most rogue-likes, the success of your run depends heavily on the power-ups the Random Number Generator (RNG) decides to give you. What this means is that the difficulty of the run can range from stupidly easy to controller smashingly hard. Fair warning, be prepared to be highly frustrated after an extended play session

as it is completely possible for the game to consistently screw you over.

FOR THE MASOCHIST

Rebirth is pretty much everything you want in a sequel. It has more items, comes packed out with extra enemies, has added-on levels, and, well, more of everything. The primary aspects are still as challenging as ever and, in some cases, are even more so due to the new enemies that now offer themselves to be real pains in the rear. For those of you who hate the notion that your game can be affected by luck, this game might not be for you. However, for gamers that are masochistic beyond reason, this game is a must have. **PC**
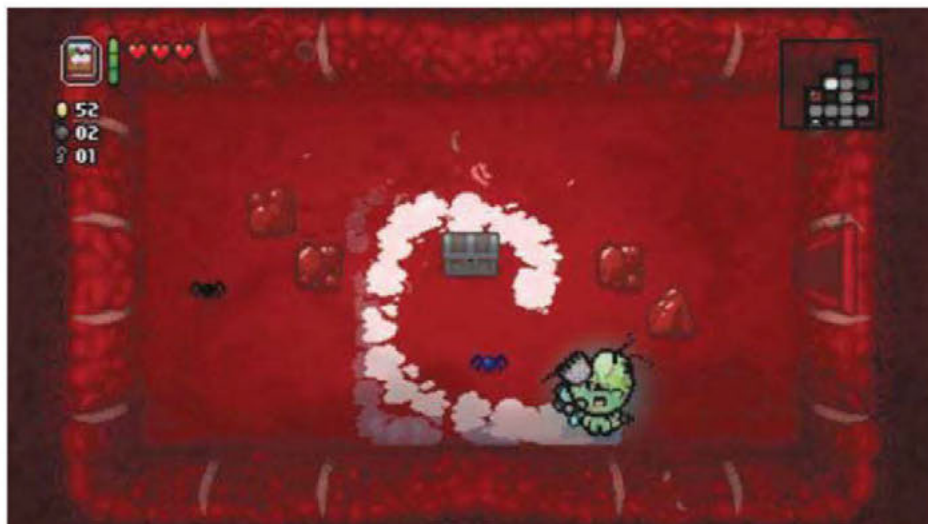
ACG Fandom Rocks Year-End

CF2014 - Bigger and better than ever

cosplay pictures by victor yap and kenneth tee

event pictures by edward mass, matthew yap, victor yap, kc lee, and kenneth tee

by edward mass

WELCOME TO COMIC FIESTA 2014 TLC FINALS

December is always a busy month for urbanites in Malaysia. This is especially true for those who call Klang Valley their home. There is Christmas and the New Year activities to contend with as well as the need to get work out of the way as soon as possible so that everyone can enjoy the long festive holidays.

For a particularly large, and still growing, crowd of anime, comic, and gaming fans - both from Malaysia and beyond its borders - none of those are as important as the biggest event for animation, comics, and games (ACG) in Malaysia. Yes, you guessed it - it's time, once again, to focus on Comic Fiesta (CF).

Back at KL Convention Centre (KLCC) like before, CF's committee reports that the estimated visitor count for last year is 49,000 - an increase of 9,000 from 2013. Even with the increased numbers, moving within the confines of the six KLCC halls at CF this time around, surprisingly, didn't feel as bad as it had been in the previous years. Certainly, this is due to the inclusion of the new floorspace that has been allocated upstairs. This extra area of walking/loitering real estate is specifically dedicated just for stage performances, the Cosplay Competition, and major VIP showcases. To spice up the festivities of that section, console game competitions and a Pokemon Battle area have been thrown in for good measure as well.

The presence of this extra volume of space eased the crowd traffic somewhat as a considerable amount of people remained in the upper-level hall and adjacent walkways for most of their two days at CF 2014. Of course, the real bulk of the crowd stayed within the confines of the ground-level hallways and the outlying park areas, ensuring smooth and easy flowing of the masses that has gathered in and around KLCC and outlying locations.

Another break from tradition is having CF-goers pour into the venue as early as 9:30am on 27 December 2014. Early-birds are immediately greeted with this year's edition of League of Legends (LoL) tournament - The Legend Circuit 2014. Beyond the gargantuan gaming battle arena, which sported some of the latest PC gaming hardware and peripherals from Logitech, ASUS, Intel, and their related partners, are premium art booths, sponsor/exhibitor halls, and the forever growing and consistently popular basic art booths where amateur and pro artists reside.

Speaking of art, those who are artistically inclined also had the chance to learn more from industry pro, Shigeto Koyama - the designer behind 'Rebuild of Evangelion', 'Kill la Kill' and many more anime-based productions. On the local front, who can ever forget Malaysian-based favourites - Ernest Ng and Black JellyFish - both known to specialise in gag comics. These two are among the many huge local

comic stars that graced CF 2014 with their legit comic skills, pure artprowess,   and literal awesomeness.

Oddly, the special guests invited for CF 2014 are spotty at best. Even so, the line-up - featuring the always witty and ever popular Danny Choo of Culture Japan, who has even brought his smart doll creations this time; to popular cosplayers such as Miyuko, Liui Aquino, Mon, and King; as well as rocking music producer, Hachioji-P AKA Prince of Vocaloid Music, are spot-on favourites for event-goers as many die-hard followers queued up to meet them at various activities that they took part in over both Event Days. In fact, fans had the opportunity to grab a picture with these VIPs on CF 2014 Day 1 and Day 2, right after their respective signing sessions.

Of course, those highlight can all be considered as teasers or the tip of the iceberg as the biggest draw for CF 2014 is, without a doubt, the Square Enix appearance, where it will shared its planned announcements for the Final Fantasy franchise.

The inaugural showcase features the reveal of local boy, Wan Hazmer, as one of the Lead Designers for Square Enix and his efforts in the company over the last few years. Currently, he is part of the team that is working on the much awaited and highly anticipated Final Fantasy XV (FFXV).

With him is Shinji Hashimoto, one of the Main Producers for Final Fantasy XV. The duo's joint presentation on CF 2014 Day 2 is the true highlight of the event for many attendees. Once on stage, the game developers shared the past and future of Final Fantasy before moving to reveal Square Enix's interest in hiring talented Malaysians to join up with the company and work on its AAA game titles. Fun and exciting times lie ahead for local talents.

Beyond that, and as everyone expected, Hazmer shared some major teasers for FFXV. While most have already aired at the Tokyo-based Jump Festa 2014, some additional visuals and information that is related to Malaysian culture, which unsurprisingly ended up being food, have been released. While the crowd went wild during Hashimoto's keynote and video presentation on the growth of the Final Fantasy as a long-running series, all of them became bonkers when Hazmer showed highly detailed visuals and sights of roti canai and teh tarik brewing in FFXV. Yes, both will be featured within the game as part of the sights and sounds of one of the towns that Noctis, the protagonist of FFXV, will be visiting.

After all the excitement and shocking chatter subsided, PC.Com, along with fellow content- and tech-journos as well as some bloggers, managed to score a group interview with the Square Enix pair to ask some questions that many Malaysia Final Fantasy fans would surely have wanted to ask. The interview will be published in the PC.com March 2015 issue, so do keep an eye out for that if you want to catch it.

(From left) Hashimoto and Hazmer opening the inaugural Final Fantasy keynote seminar at CF2014.

For all the fun and fanfare that CF 2014 has generated, not everything is sunshine and roses. The idea of the new hall, while great and much appreciated, could definitely use some logistical improvements, specifically in the crowd control and security departments, and the placement of the stage audio control console area. There are many who also believe the LoL tournament, while interesting at best, is highly disruptive to traffic control as it took up a lot of space near the entrance. Coming from the organiser's perspective, it must be considered that since they are major sponsors, then perhaps the whole situation really couldn't be helped at all.

Regardless of the slight mishaps and its forever crowd control problems, Comic Fiesta 2014 is - as a whole - another huge success for all. Props to all who are part of the organising teams and congrats on a job well done! Indeed, the PC.com team is very confident that it's only going to get better in 2015 and beyond. PC